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STUTTERING SAM THE WHITEST SPORT OF SANTA FE



OR,

How the Hummer from Hummingbird Feathered His Nest.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS,

AUTHOR OF "KANSAS KARL, THE DETECTIVE
KING," "PRINCE PRIMROSE, THE FLOWER
OF THE FLOCK," "HUCKLEBERRY,
THE FOOT-HILLS DETECTIVE,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GARCIA, THE GLADIATOR.

It was a gala day in old Santa Fe. Bands were discoursing their sweetest music in the grand Plaza. Horsemen were careering through the dusty streets, chattering, laughing and shouting, themselves and their animals decked out in the most gorgeous and fantastic manner, while crowds of peons, in gaudy holiday attire, streamed everywhere, patronizing the lunch stands and drinking establishments as recklessly as if their stomachs were composed of cast-iron. Over the doorway of every adobe, even the humblest and

THE DAUNTLESS SPORT SPRUNG BETWEEN THE ANIMAL AND ITS HAPLESS VICTIM.

most wretched, a little flag floated to the breeze, or a bunch of wild flowers or handful of odorous pine boughs testified to the joyfulness of the occasion. Even the missions and monasteries seemed to lose something of their soberness.

The cause of all this life and excitement was not difficult to find. Toward the ample circus at one end of the town were converging the streams of humanity emptying from the principal streets. Here a vast crowd had gathered and here burned most fiercely the fever that seemed to have taken possession of the populace.

The circus was, at the time, a frequent center of attraction, for therein were held the great bull-fights, ever dear to the Mexican heart.

The bulls, a dozen of them, were now in their cages, which were arranged in a semicircle about the western end of the arena. They were magnificent creatures, almost coal-black in color, and with long tapering horns keen as lance blades. They had been driven in, the night before, from the estate of Don Espaza—the noble Don making a specialty of rearing bulls of the bluest blood and finest fighting qualities for these special occasions.

Within the arena there was a motley group, representative of the cosmopolitan character of this old, yet new, city of the Southwest. There were sheep-herders from the mountains and cowboys from the plains—stalwart Navajos wrapped in their flaming blankets, fierce warriors from Apache land, and peaceful Indians from the Pueblo villages. There were cattle-kings and town-boomers, together with gamblers and confidence men, and sharp, clear-headed men of business. In short, almost every clime, nationality and character was represented. Even the Italian was there, and the Irish laborer, both brought by the coming of the new railway.

But the real center of attraction was the bull-fighters themselves—the great *espadas*, whose names were on every tongue. Clad in their Mexican finery, with short scarlet jackets covered with silver and gold lace, and silken sashes glinting like woven sunbeams, they stalked about, supremely conscious of the exalted dignity of their position.

In heavier tides the crowd poured forth from the city's streets, pushing and jostling good-naturedly, and swarming like a myriad of ants into the pavilions, and the tiers of seats that girdled the huge amphitheater.

The blare of a bugle cut sharply on the air. The bulls, as if knowing what was coming, bellowed hoarsely. All eyes were turned upon the arena.

Suddenly arose the cries:

"Garcia! Garcia! The *espada*, Garcia! Garcia will throw the black devils! Garcia's sword will drip, this day!"

The Mexicans had caught sight of their favorite, and as he ran lightly into the ring, bowing with a grace one would scarcely expect from a man of his build and stature, the cries of the excited throng swelled to a deafening roar.

He was a man of fine physique—this Manuel Garcia, the bull-fighter!—a noble creature, from a physical standpoint—as noble as were the bulls he expected to fight that day. He fairly blazed as he ran forward, the sunlight glittering and shimmering on his tinselled dress. He tossed aside his hat, which was heavy with gold and gems, and which, heavy as it was, was worth treble its weight in the precious metal. Then he folded his muscular arms over his brawny breast, and with the utmost politeness bowed again and again to the cheering audience.

Having thus testified his appreciation of the ovation accorded him, he turned to the curtained pavilion which arose like a miniature watch-tower at one side of the grand circus. Within this pavilion were the chief dignitaries of the place.

The days of the old *alcaldes* were over, and Santa Fe now boasted a mayor—visible testimony of the growing power of the all-conquering Anglo-Saxon. In truth, it was a question which was the stronger, the American or the Spanish element of the town.

As the bull-fighter bowed toward the pavilion, the mayor, a down-east Yankee, with a bald and shiny pate, rose and returned the salute with characteristic awkwardness.

Then the great *espada* delivered in florid, exaggerated style the speech customary on such occasions.

Again the bugle blared; and as if the vibrating notes had been a key, the door of one of the cages flew open, and a fierce black bull bounded into the arena, with an echoing bellow. The unaccustomed sunlight blinded him, and for a full half minute he stood on the arena's edge, staring bewilderedly about, his sides quivering as he nervously lashed them with his tail. Then he gave another hoarse bellow, and pawed the earth so furiously that he was half hidden by the cloud of dust he created.

The enthusiasm of the audience passed all bounds. Men leaped to their feet, and swung and shook their hats like maniacs; while the women, no less frenzied, clapped their hands and fluttered their fans and handkerchiefs in a fervor equal to that of their male companions.

The assistants of the *espada*, the *bandilleros* and *picadores*, attired as flashily as was their

chief, bounded into the inclosure at this moment, ready to do their part in the tragedy of the day. The *bandilleros* carried each a scarlet cloak and a handful of short javelins, while the *picadores* were mounted and armed with long, keen lances.

Stationing themselves near Garcia they awaited the onslaught of the bull, which could not now be long delayed, the *bandilleros* agitating their cloaks to increase the fury of the already infuriated animal.

The shouts and screams of the populace were now hushed, the interest being too intense for words.

As the bull still continued to bellow and paw the earth, one of the *bandilleros*, tripped lightly in front of him and with deft skill, planted two javelins, decked with the bull-fighter's colors, in the shoulders of the noble beast. Then he stepped as lightly backward and tauntingly waved the red cloak under the bull's very nose.

No bull of his quality could stand so great an insult. The keen javelins stung him to frenzy, and the flaunting red roused his greatest ire. Quick as a flash, almost, he charged the daring man. But the latter was out and away, leaving the bull to spend his fury on the empty wind.

There was again a fluttering of hats, fans and handkerchiefs, and a sound of subdued cheering.

The bull-fighter had taken his station in the very center of the inclosure, armed only with a long, thin sword. The bull, baffled and more angry than ever by his unsuccessful chase of the fleet-footed *bandillero*, swept the circle of faces with red and rolling eyes. Instantly his glance fell on the *espada*. The latter's gleaming dress seemed to irritate him quite as much as had the flaunting of the scarlet cloak. He lowered his head and came straight at Garcia, a picture of savage beauty as he made this most magnificent charge.

Once more was the crowd stilled into a death-like calm.

Not until the cruel tapering horns of the beast were within a foot of him did the bull-fighter stir from his attitude of easy repose. Then, like a flash, he took one quick step sideward. The bull's momentum was too great to permit it to swerve or change its course. For an instant the sunlight flashed from the keen, thin sword; then the weapon was sheathed to the hilt in the unfortunate animal's heart.

Almost instantly it fell prone and quivering; the acclaim of the populace rent the skies; and before the bull had ceased to breathe, ropes were fastened about his horns, and it was being drawn from the arena by a pair of stout horses.

To the mind of the average American the tragedy was bloody, useless and brutal. It pandered, seemingly, to the lowest and basest instincts of the human race. To the Mexican, however, it was a performance calling for the most enthusiastic approbation. Bull-fighting is to the entire Spanish race what the old gladiatorial combats were to the ancient Romans.

In addition to Manuel Garcia, two other *espadas* were to share the honors of the day. Although good fighters they were not as skillful as he; but the applause of the populace tickled their ears as it had jickled his.

Three bulls had been slain with the neatness and dispatch which had characterized the killing of the first.

Then Garcia again took his place in the center of the arena, and another animal was released from its cage.

It was a wild, ferocious monster, and did not act at all after the regulation manner. Instead of charging the *espada* it made a fierce dash at the arena fence. The strong structure gave way beneath the crushing weight of its ponderous bulk, and it was free to wreck and slay as it willed.

Instantly the wildest confusion prevailed. Women and children screamed in fright, while the men, many of them, were equally panic-stricken. A stampede ensued, in which the weaker were pressed down and overthrown by the stronger in the mad rush for safety.

Every one had fled from the vicinity of the bull save the bull-fighters and their attendants, who were struggling to get at the animal.

At this instant the attention of the infuriated beast was directed to the slight figure of a woman who had attempted to cross in front of him to a point of refuge. She was clothed in the sober habiliments of the Catholic sisterhood. Her face, pale with fright, was made seemingly paler by the whiteness of the hooded bonnet.

With a scream that was terrific and almost human in its tones, the bull made directly at her. Apparently no living power could save her from impalement and death. She realized her peril, and believing that it was hopeless to make any further effort to escape, dropped upon the sand and lifted her eyes and hands heavenward.

Those who were witnesses of this touching scene stopped in their mad scramble and watched with bated breath, expecting to see her fatally tossed or mangled beyond recognition.

But, a new actor appeared upon the scene! A powerfully-built and handsome man ran quickly forward from the awed crowd. To judge from his dress he belonged to the sporting fraternity, for Santa Fe was at that time filled with

gamblers and their parasites. A glossy silk hat rested on his head, his shirt front was spotless in its purity, and in every way his attire was of the neatest and most immaculate.

With a bravery that was incomparable the dauntless sport sprung between the animal and its hapless victim. His shapely right hand shot out with nervous quickness. It held a revolver of large caliber. There was a flash and a report; and as the heavy leaden missile tore its way to the brain of the bull, the latter fell forward like a beef in the shambles.

And the enraptured crowd, as they cheered the brave deed, passed the information from lip to lip that the lady whose life had been saved was Juanita Concha, and that her rescuer was Stuttering Sam, the sport!

CHAPTER II.

THE HUMMER FROM HUMMINGBIRD.

THERE had come into the town the day before the bull-fight, a man of polite address and suave manner, who had given out that his name was Hike Hartsook, and who boasted the rather unique title of the Hummer from Hummingbird. He was an apparently slightly built person, with a pale smooth face, twinkling blue eyes, and abundant blonde hair of such length that it fell in golden masses upon his shoulders. The blonde hair would have been sufficient to single him out in any crowd—but, as if this were not enough, there was perched on his head a tall, bell-crowned hat, adorned with a pair of cuckoo-wings. But for their oddity and suggestion of effeminacy, the cuckoo wings would not have made bad ornaments, being attached to the sides of the hat-crown and sweeping back in graceful curves.

The Hummer from Hummingbird, as he had chosen to designate himself, was, or professed to be, an antiquarian; and had come into the region for the purpose of delving into the old Spanish records and of studying the extremely interesting history of Indian and white occupancy.

He had been a witness of the bull-fight, and had applauded as loudly as any other the daring deed of Stuttering Sam.

On this morning, the morning of his introduction to the notice of the reader, he was picking his way airily and jauntily in the direction of the Mission of San Muerto.

The Mission of San Muerto was known to be particularly rich in matters interesting to the antiquarian, reaching back itself to the days of the Franciscan friars, who had penetrated into the wilderness many decades before, bearing fatigue and even death for the cause they loved.

There was no beauty in the structure, for it was built in the form of a huge square and without any attempt at architectural display, and the flat walls were white, blank and uninteresting.

Father Petrie, well-known in the city and throughout the surrounding country, stood in the huge doorway—the big, figured gate being wide open—and stared lazily out at the town.

"Good-morning!" and the Hummer doffed his bewinged hat as he drew near.

The salute was returned, for the father was on most occasions socially inclined.

"Could I—ah—take a look at some of the records you have behind these walls? I learn they are most wonderful and interesting. Hartsook, Hike Hartsook, is my name. I am an antiquarian, and I—ah—hail from Denver."

As he said this, Hartsook extended his card. It was not unusual for strangers to thus accost Father Petrie and request permission to look at the records and treasures of the old Spanish days.

The priest took the card and glanced curiously from it to the singular individual before him. He had beheld many odd characters, for visiting antiquarians were inclined to be cranky, but he mentally confessed that his eyes had never fallen on quite so outlandish a specimen as the one before him.

Nevertheless, still holding the card in his hand, he turned from the gate into the inclosure, and shuffled with slippered feet along the wide corridor.

Taking this as an invitation for him to follow, the Hummer pressed after his priestly guide, and was led into a musty nook of the main building, the walls and floors of which were almost covered with curios and ancient manuscripts.

Here, seating himself in a chair, Father Petrie motioned his visitor to another.

"Look as you will, and may the Lord be with you and bless the looking! I shall have to remain, however. No offense, I hope, for none is meant. It is merely a rule of the institution. So many strangers come, and—no offense, again—the things here are valuable, and we cannot trust every one."

The Hummer from Hummingbird smiled blandly; but he made no reply, and turned to an examination of the various articles that attracted his fancy.

"Here are the records of the San Muerto Mission," and Father Petrie placed some bulky packages in the hands of his visitor.

Hartsook glanced at one and saw inscribed thereon an account of the doings of a priest named Garcia.

"Ah!" he said, pointing out the name to the worthy father, "this is a world of coincidences. The bull-fighter of yesterday is named Garcia."

"You speak truly," and Petrie's eyes held a smile. "And a most brave *espada* he is."

The Hummer reseated himself and placed the packages on his knees.

"Did you witness the fight?" and his face beamed.

"Ay, truly."

"And the rescue?"

"Yes, yes!"

Immediately the Hummer waxed voluble in the praise of the daring man who had risked impalement to save the life of the imperiled lady.

"It was a brave act!" he cried. "As courageous a piece of work as I ever saw. I have seen men in battle. I have beheld them on the raging waters when the storm-king raved, I have seen them beset with perils on the plains and in the mountains—facing dangers in every shape—yet I feel safe in saying that I never witnessed such coolness and heroism!"

Hartsook had struck the right chord. It was very evident that Father Petrie had been pleased and impressed by the daring of Stuttering Sam.

"And the lady?" the Hummer exclaimed.

Father Petrie frowned. Juanita Concha was an inmate of the Mission of San Muerto, a fact well known to the voluble antiquarian. Hartsook, unheeding the frown, went on:

"A most charming creature, my dear sir! Pale as the lilies of the valley! Lovely as the rose of Sharon. My good father, I have seldom seen her equal!"

The frown on Petrie's face deepened.

Hartsook, however, was resolved not to notice it.

"Could you give me the address of the young lady? I noticed—ah—that she wore the garments of those who have taken orders."

"She has not taken orders!" declared Father Petrie, stung to a reply. "She is only a girl here in the Mission school."

"Ah!" and the Hummer elevated his eyebrows. The priest was beginning to give information, and that was what he wanted.

"Just a school-girl, and her name is Concha? Um-huh!"

"My dear sir, what is it to you *what* she is?" questioned Petrie, sternly facing his visitor.

"Only a matter of idle curiosity," Hartsook asserted; and then, seeing that he could gain no further knowledge from the priest on that subject, he turned to a consideration of the manuscripts heaped up on his knees.

An hour later he left the San Muerto Mission, swinging along as jauntily as he came; and there was a pleased smile on his face, for he had been able that day to make progress in a task dear to his heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE CREST-HUNTER.

In an unobtrusive side street there swung to the breeze a somewhat singular sign. The name on it was rather commonplace, but the business announced was what would attract attention.

This was the sign's inscription:

"CLARKSON JINKS.

"Lineage Records, Coats of Arms, Family Crests and Heraldic Devices Furnished with Promptness and Accuracy."

The strange business thus advertised was conducted in a cool and airy office set back slightly from the street.

Within the office, at the hour of 9 A. M., sat a young man, with his feet cocked negligently on the office table. He was a pale-eyed, sandy-mustached individual, of a quick and nervous temperament. A cigar was gripped, tightly between his teeth, and with hands swinging lazily at his side, and with chair tilted, he watched the spirals of smoke as they curled toward the ceiling.

There was little in the room to indicate the nature of his calling, save a few books on heraldry, in a swinging book-case. Three chairs and the table constituted the sole other furniture.

Clarkson Jinks, the crest-hunter, as he frequently styled himself, was aroused from his quiet meditations by the entrance of two men, who were strangers to him.

One of them once seen could never be forgotten, for the long, blonde hair and the cuckoo wings on the bell-crowned hat made Hike Hartsook a man to be remembered.

The Hummer's companion was a man of quite different mold. He was tall and dark, rather distinguished looking, intelligent and handsome. One would instantly set him down as of Spanish descent.

Clarkson Jinks's slim legs came down with surprising celerity as the forms of the two men darkened the doorway.

"My dear sirs, I am glad to see you!" pushing the two extra chairs into the center of the room for the accommodation of the callers, and at the same time looking curiously at the cuckoo wings on the Hummer's hat.

Hartsook introduced himself and his companion, giving the name of the latter as Cerro

Cenci; then there was a shaking of hands and a discussion of the weather, and a pause for want of further subject matter.

"I have heard of you," said Hartsook, looking placidly at Jinks. "And we have come, Mr. Cenci and I, on a little matter of business."

At the intimation that business was to be transacted Jinks looked again at the cuckoo wings.

"I could furnish you something handsome in the way of a family crest by making use of those things. Nothing would look prettier on a shield."

The Hummer laughed.

"I am afraid it would be a difficult piece of work to trace my ancestry. I know the name of my grandfather, but from that back to Adam is a perfect blank."

"Nothing is easier," Jinks asserted. "The less there is known the freer play I can give my imagination; and when I turn my fancy loose and let it out to the full end of the tether I can get up some beautiful things—I really can!"

"It is business of quite another kind," said the Hummer. "At present I am not caring much about crests or coats of arms. But you may be valuable to me in another way. I understand you have free access to the records in the Mission of San Muerto, and that you are something of a Spanish scholar."

"Those old manuscripts are pretty difficult to read, but I manage to get through them after a fashion. The language and the writing have both changed a good deal in the last two hundred years. I like it all the better for that, for I can make these rich Dons pay me handsomely for looking up the records of their families. More than half of them are of the basest plebeian origin, but every mother's son of them lays claim to direct descent from some old Castilian family, or the last of the Montezumas."

"I think you are the man we want," and Hartsook smiled encouragingly. "I am not a Spanish scholar, though I have been trying to make Father Petrie believe that I am. I am here in the interests of Mr. Cenci; I need help, and you are the man to help me."

He looked at the crest-hunter to see how this information would be taken, before proceeding.

"I am not going it blind, Mr. Jinks; I have made thorough inquiries as to your character, standing and capabilities. Mr. Cenci has papers which show his descent from one of the old and historic families of New Mexico. As to their genuineness there can be no question. Certain lands which are rich in mines and grazing pastures are his by right, though they are now held by another. Perhaps you know Jason Deel?"

The question was fired suddenly; and the look which Jinks gave in response showed that the crest-hunter was well and even intimately acquainted with the man.

"He is a grand scoundrel!"

The Hummer made the assertion with great boldness and firmness, and it was received as he had anticipated.

"If he would only spell his name De'il he would get it about correct!" Clarkson declared.

"You are right in that, for he is a devil, if there ever was one. These valuable lands of which I spoke are held by Jason Deel. How he came into possession of them I do not as yet know. But I feel sure it was in no honest way. I have looked at the books of the county and on their face the papers which give him title seem straight enough. Mr. Cenci's father is dead, having died many years ago, but he left letters which show that the land was never conveyed out of the family. These letters would not be accepted as proof, very probably, in any court, and so we must get something else."

"And here is where you can help us, Mr. Jinks. Your knowledge of the records in the San Muerto Mission must prove invaluable. I am satisfied that behind those walls there are papers which will show that Mr. Cenci is the real owner of the land in question. And the search for these is the work we want you to undertake."

Much more was said to the same effect which it is not necessary to here set down. Clarkson Jinks was fully informed of all the details of the task he was asked to attempt, and so conclusive were the arguments and proofs which Cenci and the Hummer were able to produce that he readily acceded to their wishes in this respect.

Nearly the whole forenoon Clarkson Jinks and his visitors were closeted together; and when the Hummer and Cenci left the office they felt that in him they had gained an able ally.

CHAPTER IV.

A COMPACT.

"If I c-could g-get to see her again! Could get t-to talk with her a f-few minutes! H-hang it all, any w-way! I h-hate t-to con-f-fess that I'm all b-broke up about the girl!"

Samuel Hollingsworth, better known as Stuttering Sam, had been in a very uneasy frame of mind ever since his adventure in the circus arena on the day of the great bull-fight. The marvelous beauty of the girl whose life he had been instrumental in saving, had impressed him as had the beauty of no other woman. She was wonderfully fair, albeit after the somewhat

dark Spanish fashion, and the velvet of her cheeks and the luster of her eyes could not be hidden by the sober garments she wore.

Stuttering Sam had seen her for but a few brief moments, and had exchanged with her barely a dozen words, but this had been sufficient to fire a heart which he had always considered case-hardened against the witcheries of woman.

The seeming hopelessness of the passion which he cherished appeared to give it vitality. A dozen times he had declared that he would think no more of Juanita Concha, and as many times he had broken these resolutions as soon as they were made.

Finding it impossible to get her out of his mind, he had strolled this evening into a little by-street in the suburbs of the town, that he might be alone with his thick-coming fancies.

"Th-the d-d-deuce of it is that they k-keep the girl sh-sh-shut up all the time in that inf-fernal m-mission over there. I s-s-suppose that they intend to m-make a w-w-w-weeping nun out of her. 'Twill b-be a b-b-blamed shame if they d-do—that's what it will! I'd like to p-punch the head of that old hunk, Father Petrie, f-for I reckon he c-c-c-considers himself her guardian. Seems to me i-i-its an awful th-th-thing to shut up a girl like th-that for l-life!"

After the excitement had quieted, on the day of the bull-fight, and when the crowds had thinned out, Stuttering Sam had hunted up the gladiator, Manuel Garcia, and sought to learn what he could concerning the girl.

The gladiator was on intimate terms of acquaintance with the inmates of the San Muerto Mission. The priest who always attended him at prayers before each fight was none other than Father Petrie, for Garcia was a good churchman. Petrie was likewise his father-confessor. Stuttering Sam, therefore, could have applied to no one better posted.

The gladiator, who had formed a very high opinion of the stuttering sport, willingly told all he knew, but the information added little to the store of Stuttering Sam's knowledge. He did learn, however, that Juanita Concha had been in the Mission school many years, having been brought there when a mere infant. By whom brought, though, Garcia could not say.

Every day, since, the sport had haunted the streets in the vicinity of the Mission, hoping for a chance encounter with the young woman. But he had been doomed to disappointment.

As Stuttering Sam strolled to and fro in the deserted by-street, muttering to himself of his hopes and fears, a bar of moonlight revealed the proportions of his form as well as the anxiety which marked his face. As has been said, he was a strongly-built and handsome man, and of pleasing address. But for the stammering that marred his speech, and the character of his calling, he might have shown to advantage in any society.

In the Southwest, at the time of this story, the fact that a man gambled was not held especially to his detriment. Thinking of himself, however, with reference to his love for Juanita Concha, Stuttering Sam had felt somewhat the moral degradation of his calling. It must be confessed, though, that he had felt much more keenly the disadvantage under which he was placed by his stuttering speech.

Having crossed the bar of moonlight and reached the end of the short street, he turned in his walk, and, with hands behind him, strolled back over the way he had just traversed.

He had taken barely a dozen steps, when three men rushed upon him from behind an abandoned adobe.

They were on him almost before he was aware of it.

The leader was a brawny fellow, with a face much scarred by small-pox, and his followers, apparently, were Irish laborers.

"Ah, we've got ye, now!" the leader exclaimed, as he leaped upon the surprised sport.

"Yez'll be afther ch'atin' us ag'in, will yez?" howled one of the Celts, aiming a furious blow at Stuttering Sam's head.

Although unprepared for such an onslaught, the sport showed himself quick to think and act. With one hand he grasped the leader by the throat, and with the other knocked down the Irishman who had howled the question at him. But the third was on his back at almost the same instant. The one knocked down no sooner struck the earth than he was on his feet again, and striking away as before.

It was thus made impossible for Stuttering Sam to retain his hold on the throat of the leader; and although he fought bravely, he could not hope to long cope successfully with three such adversaries.

Except for the speech of the Irishman he did not know why they were attacking him, and even this did not make matters very clear, for he was sure he had never played with either of the three, and therefore could not have cheated them as charged.

But he had little time for thought, for every faculty was absorbed in the struggle of the moment.

His assailants were vigorous fighters, and knew so well how to use their fists that it would have gone hard with the sport, notwithstanding his

ability, under all ordinary circumstances, to take care of himself in a row.

Aided by his comrades, the leader of the ruffians was quickly able to turn the tables, and grasp the sport by the throat as he had himself been grasped. And in this position, with the others mauling away at him, Sam was being rapidly reduced to a mass of hurts and bruises.

But there appeared on the scene one who was destined to change the appearance of affairs in rather short order.

This was the redoubtable Hummer from Hummingbird!

The Hummer was something of a night-hawk in his habits, and given to solitary walks and self-communings; and had by the merest chance come upon this by-street at the time of the combat.

He recognized Stuttering Sam, but even if he had not done so the instincts which always prompt a man to take the side of the under dog would have led him to a participation in the affray.

"Three against one isn't no fair show, now, is it?" he shouted, as he sprung toward the combatants. "You might as well make it an even dozen! So, come now, let up on that or I'll have to pitch in just to see that there's fair play."

No heed was paid to his words, as a matter of course; and the cuckoo-winged hat was given to the wind, as he rushed to the assistance of the sorely-pressed sport.

The Hummer, in spite of his seeming slight build—which was but seeming, for he was really a well-muscled young fellow—was no mean fighter, as many had had occasion to testify, and as he reached the struggling quartette he delivered a blow, so well aimed and squarely-planted that it laid the ruffian leader flat on the ground with a badly broken head.

Only the two Irishmen were left, now, to oppose the sport and Hartsook; and these, taking fright at the Hummer's sudden coming, and thinking it likely others would follow, promptly took to their heels and made off as fast as their legs could carry them.

The leader, coming to himself soon after, was assisted in his flight by a gentle agitation of his coat-tails given by the toe of the Hummer's boot.

"Now, sit down and tell me all about it!" and Hartsook, with characteristic coolness, took a seat on a convenient stone, and motioned Stuttering Sam to another that lay near. "They seem to have had it in for you, for some reason."

Stuttering Sam was evidently acquainted with the man who had so opportunely come to his aid. Laughing lightly at Hartsook's brusqueness, he took the seat pointed out, and felt gingerly of the bruises on his face.

"There can be no question th-that they w-were determ-m-ined to p-p-pulverize me!" he sputtered. "As to wh-what I've been d-doing, though, h-hanged if I know. Th-they charged me with ch-cheating them at cards. B-but the sc-scoundrels lied, wh-when they said so."

"Who were they?" the Hummer asked. "I have seen that big fellow. He's pretty badly scarred; and if he was an Indian, his friends would call him old Rain-in-the-Face."

"He's the f-foreman of a bridge g-gang on the n-n-new railway. I've seen the sc-scamp often; b-but I'm sure I n-never had any d-d-dealings with him. Th-there's something b-back of it a-a-all. Those fellows w-with him w-were some of his work-m-men."

"Well, let that pass, now. I'll look into the matter a little on my own account. I've been wanting to see you, Hollingsworth, for two or three days, but didn't drop onto the opportunity. I think we can help each other. I was over to the San Muerto Mission to-day."

Stuttering Sam looked up sharply, an interrogation in his very attitude.

"Ha! I thought that would catch you."

"Y-you're not a-g-guying me, now?"

"Honor bright! I've been haunting that old graveyard for several days."

"You s-saw her, then?"

"Juanita Concha? You've been wearing your heart on your sleeve lately, my good friend, and the world has been watching its pulsations. More than a hundred beats to a minute, is a popular estimation. If you aren't careful there will be a case of fever set in that all the doctors in Santa Fe can't cure."

"N-not so bad as th-that, I h-h-hope!" and the moonlight showed that Stuttering Sam had essayed a sickly smile.

"I think it's the worst case in town!" beaming at him knowingly. "But that doesn't matter; for we all have been there more or less—chiefly more. It's love, my dear fellow, that makes the world go round. Heigh-ho! without it life would be like an Arizona sand waste."

"I m-must c-c-confess that you have probed my secret," declared the sport, fidgeting nervously with his watch-guard. "I d-did th-think, though, that I had s-sense enough n-not to g-give it away to the whole t-town."

"It's all right. Perhaps I've been pulling the long bow a little! There mayn't be more than two or three hundred that have dropped on to it; and I'll inaugurate desperate measures to keep the rest from finding it out. For my own part, I'm glad the gentle god has winged you,

In my excursions into the musty land of San Muerto I may be able to help you. I have already seen the lovely Juanita—on two separate occasions I managed to converse with her. Now, don't grow envious and jealous until you have heard me out. Then you can assassinate me, if you want to. But you won't want to."

"You know what I'm down here for?"

Stuttering Sam nodded assent.

"A man of about your build and heft and influence, moving in the exclusive circles of a high-toned gaming room, hand-and-glove with all the swell villains—and in saying that I don't mean any disparagement of yourself, for I account you a pretty good fellow and the whitest sport in Santa Fe—such a man, I say could help me very materially."

"I want to get at Jason Deel, and the crowd he keeps around him. If you will help me at that end of the line, I'll do what I can for you with the hooded beauty over at the San Muerto."

Stuttering Sam had been listening closely, and with the gravest mien.

He now arose, and extended his hand.

"H-Hartsook, I'll d-do it. If y-you'll stand by me in this little—in this little—matter, I'll stick to you c-closer than a br-brother!"

The extended hand was grasped warmly; and the compact, meaning so much to each, was sealed.

CHAPTER V.

A RASCAL AND HIS ALLY.

FATHER PETRIE, seated in his scantily-furnished room in the San Muerto Mission, was diligently poring over a book, when he was aroused by a light footstep; and turning, saw Jason Deel at his elbow.

Deel was a black-browed, shaggy-bearded man of about fifty. His frame was strong and well-knit, and time seemed to have dealt lightly with him. His features were not unhandsome, though there was something in them which repelled intimacy and close friendship. He could boast parasites, however, in abundance; for he was reputed to be a man of wealth; and wealth will draw admirers around a man, and servile imitators, if not friends.

The priest wheeled about and looked questioningly at Deel, and motioned him to a chair.

"You are alone here?" Deel asked.

"All alone; so, if you have anything to say, you can freely say it. A man like me, who carries the secrets of so many people, may be trusted not to have inquisitive ears too near him."

"I came over for a talk."

"So I presume!" and Father Petrie bobbed his head and rubbed his fat chin, while his little eyes twinkled. "I am one of those who have ears to hear."

"Things ain't going just to suit me," Deel asserted.

"It's the way of the world!" Petrie philosophized. "They seldom do, unless we take hold and make them go to suit us."

"You've heard of the coming of this Hummer from Hummingbird?" Deel queried.

Again Father Petrie rubbed his fat chin and bobbed his head.

"He has been here."

"Not here in the Mission?"

"Yes," said Petrie, "here in the Mission."

"And what has he been doing here?"

"Looking at the curios and the records. No particular harm in that, is there?"

"Harm! Why, man, he'll ruin both of us!"

Father Petrie stared wonderingly; for the information given had greatly agitated his visitor.

"I don't understand you," he said, mildly.

"Take that; perhaps it will brighten your wits!" and Jason Deel dropped a half-dozen shining gold-pieces into the priest's palm. "They are for the Mission and its good work."

He winked, as he made this last statement; a wink that Father Petrie seemed to understand full well, for he smiled amiably as he placed the gold-pieces carefully in the pigeon-hole of a desk and covered them from sight with a bit of paper.

"Perhaps you don't know that Cerro Cenci is in town, as well as the Hummer from Hummingbird. I shouldn't fear Cenci, if he was alone; but, backed by Hartsook, he is liable to prove extremely dangerous."

The priest was the one to show perturbation, now; for, for some reason, he feared Cerro Cenci.

"I have had my spies at work," resumed Deel, "and they have brought me a lot of information that I could have wished not to hear. You said you had ears. Likely you have, but I'm afraid you haven't eyes. If you had, you wouldn't have let Hartsook make himself so free with matters in the Mission here."

"Now, harken! Hike Hartsook, Stuttering Sam and Clarkson Jinks, have entered into a combination to do me up; and in doing me up, Father Petrie, they will be apt to hit you pretty hard, or I miss my guess."

"What can be done?" implored the priest, his obese form quivering with the intensity of his excitement.

"That's what I'm coming to! In the first place, you must not allow the Hummer from Hummingbird to come here any more."

"But we have no rules to exclude visitors, so long as they do no injury," the priest protested. "How, then, am I to keep him out?"

"He is doing injury. Not to the Mission, perhaps, but to you and me, and our friends. It will be a very easy matter. He has been violating the rules of the institution, in that he, a stranger, has been conversing with one of the female inmates, Juanita Concha."

The priest's excitement gave place to anger.

"And the heretical creature dared to come to confession this morning and not say a word about it!"

"Ah, my dear father! although you have ears to hear it is quite plain that you don't hear everything."

"What was he saying to her?" Petrie questioned, not heeding the thrust.

"You'll have to ask her, for I don't know; but the chances are about ten to one that it related to Stuttering Sam. Sam has been mooning about her ever since the little affair at the bull-fight. That's another thing, I suppose, that you didn't hear in confession!"

"Sam isn't a son of the church," Father Petrie declared, rebukingly.

"But she is; and if I'm not mistaken, she has been mooning about him quite as much as he has about her."

"That shall be looked into!" and the priest's face visibly darkened.

"I have said that Hike Hartsook should not be allowed to come here any more; and the remark applies equally well to Clarkson Jinks."

"I can't keep him out," Petrie asserted. "He is in the record room, now, with Father Manzantini; and has been there all morning."

"You must keep him out!"

"It is impossible," Petrie urged. "I haven't supreme power here, you know. Clarkson Jinks is a very discreet young man; he never violates any of the rules of the Mission; and Manzantini is his friend. And Manzantini has as much right to say who shall come and go as I have."

"You must keep him out!" Deel fiercely repeated. "How to do it you will have to find out for yourself. If there isn't a way, you can make a way; and if there isn't a rule, you must make a rule. If he is not excluded and forbidden the privileges of the place, we are both undone!"

"I don't see how it's to be accomplished," and the priest wrinkled his brows in thought. "I'm afraid it can't be done."

"All things are possible to the man that tries—if he only tries hard enough!" Deel asserted.

"I presume you know everything that's in those records?" and he turned sharply on Petrie. "What do they say that can implicate me? What is there about the Cenci family, and about these lands?"

"There are a good many things about the Cenci family; but just what, I don't know."

Deel's eyes blazed.

"You don't know?" scornfully.

Father Petrie quailed a little.

"One can't expect to know everything that's contained in those old papers!"

"But I've been paying you for work, and you haven't been doing it. What book have you got there?"

Petrie piously pursed his lips.

"It's the life of St. Ignatius, of blessed memory."

"You'd better throw it away, and go to studying something that will be of more benefit. I've an idea that the most of those saints were, in their day, grand old humbugs. If you'll throw that book away, and put your time in on those records, I'll give you credit for being a man of sense."

"Clarkson Jinks is down there now looking for every scrap of paper that will help him and his friends. You've got to head him off. You say you can't keep him out of the Mission—well, then, you can beat him in the race for those papers. You must exclude him or get those papers first. If you don't the jig is up. The Cenci land will go back to the Cenci family; and, my dear Father Petrie, our names will be Dennis!"

He leaned forward, with his chin resting in his hands, and looked the priest squarely in the eyes, as he made these assertions.

"I will do the best I can!" Petrie promised, trembling so violently that his fat cheeks shook.

"That's something like! If you'll do what you can, and all you can, you'll accomplish something. There will be some work about it; and you'll get rid of a little of that fat, and feel all the better for your unaccustomed exertions."

He arose and took up his hat to go.

"It's a race between you and Clarkson Jinks; and the devil—or something worse—is sure to get the last in the race. Keep your head cool, and your feet hot with the running; and you'll get there."

And with this exhortation the astute Jason Deel abruptly departed.

CHAPTER VI.

A DASTARDLY DEED.

JASON DEEL was doing some severe thinking as he left the San Muerto Mission. The triple alliance which had been entered into against him by Stuttering Sam, Clarkson Jinks and the Hummer from Hummingbird caused him to

realize that he had before him a contest the like of which he had never entered upon.

The immense estate claimed by Cerro Cenci as his by right of inheritance, had been held by Deel for many, many years. The estate was so vast in extent, and withal so rich in undeveloped mines, that it was worth vigorous fighting. There were not many estates more valuable in the New Mexican country.

Deel's relations with Father Petrie were somewhat unique. The priest was a crafty fellow, and although making great pretensions to godliness was not overburdened with a conscience. At the time that Deel was scheming to get possession of the lands, the foxy priest became aware of what was going on, and boldly approached him on the subject. The result was that Deel made the worthy father his confidant; and ever since then had given liberally to Petrie and to the church to obtain the priest's silence.

Inasmuch as this had continued for years, Jason Deel had gained a great reputation for the liberality of his donations to the San Muerto Mission.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Father Petrie was not a representative of the priests of the New Mexican capital; for as noble men may be found there, and as pure lives are lived there as anywhere. He was simply a wolf in sheep's clothing—a man who had made his way into a position which he defiled and dishonored.

Usually Jason Deel's thinking was followed by quick acting; and this case proved no exception to the rule. He knew the bridge foreman, the man of the small-pox face; and as it was now near the dinner hour, he made his way to the foreman's boarding-house.

He found the man there, as he had hoped to do. "Have a cigar?" taking this method of attracting the foreman's attention.

Then, as the cigars were lighted, he managed to whisper:

"I'd like to see you for a few minutes in your room!"

The foreman winked knowingly; but he made no answer, and sauntered leisurely away.

A few moments later the two were closeted together in the foreman's room, which was a remote one on the second floor.

"Now, see here, Taulbee,"—the scar-faced individual answered to the name of Tom Taulbee—"what's to hinder you from doing a piece of work for me, provided I pay you well enough for it?"

"Nothin' at all, I reckon, if it don't interfere with my job. An' if there's money enough in it, the ole job kin go. What is it you want?"

"There's a certain fellow in this town who hasn't business enough of his own to attend to, and so he proposes to try to attend to some of mine. You know him well enough. His name is Hollingsworth, and he is called Stuttering Sam."

The scarred face of the bridge foreman darkened with hate, as he heard the name.

"I know 'im well enough; and you bet I hain't any cause to love 'im. He gimme that, las' night!"

He pointed to a discoloration on his cheek.

"Slightly playful with his fists, eh?"

It pleased Deel to know that Taulbee had cause for anger against this man. The deeper the bridge foreman's anger the better ally he would make for Deel, and the less the latter would have to pay.

"You'll only be too glad to do what I want you to do, then? It will bring revenge to you, and will keep him so busy for a few days that he won't have time to look after matters that don't concern him."

"The embankment just beyond the bridge where you are working almost overhangs his mine?"

"Yes," assented the foreman, wondering what Deel was driving at.

"And there's been a regular lake of water collected behind that embankment, brought down by the last rise in the creek?"

Again the foreman affirmed the truth of the statement.

"Find means to break that embankment and flood the mine. There's enough water there to ruin it. I don't care how you do it, so that it's done. I wouldn't suggest the wrecking of a train; though that mightn't be a bad way to accomplish it."

Taulbee looked at Deel quizzically.

"You're a cool one!"

"I know you pretty well, Taulbee. It won't do for the kettle to go to calling the pot 'Blackie.'"

A grin distorted the foreman's scarred face.

"Well, I sha'n't then! But what is it in it? In money, I mean! The pay ought to be purty good for a feller to take sich a big risk!"

"You can make it seem an accident; and if the job's done right I'll give you two hundred. Think it over; and the sooner you do the work, the quicker you get your money and your revenge."

About the middle of the afternoon one of the laborers employed on the bridge and embankment came riding furiously into the town with information that the embankment had given way. He had been instructed by his chief, he said, to hurry in with the news. Being afoot, he had caught a horse that he might come the faster.

The story was not slow in reaching the ears of Stuttering Sam; and with a number of friends he hastened to the scene of the wreck. He had observed the embankment only a couple of days before, and it had then seemed strong enough. The quick suspicion had come to him that the break had not occurred naturally.

He did not think of Deel in connection with the matter; but, recollecting the attack of the night before, he did mistrust the bridge foreman.

"No doubt the mine is flooded," the sport averred, to his companions, as he hurried along at his best gait, "and it will be a big loss to me."

When they reached the broken embankment they found their worst fears realized. No work had been done in the mine lately; and apparently it was, as Stuttering Sam had feared, completely ruined.

"Keep back out o' that!" Taulbee cried, unable to control his belligerent feelings, as the sport and his friends rushed through the mud slush to the shaft of the mine. "I've got some o' my men in there, tryin' to keep any more damage frum bein' done."

Stuttering Sam considered that no further damages could be done than had been done already; and turned to an inspection of the broken embankment.

"See here," he said, after a hasty survey, sternly facing the foreman. "It isn't a difficult thing to determine just how high the water stood before the break came; and there wasn't enough of it to cut through there in any such fashion!"

"D'ye mean to say that I had any hand in it?" and Taulbee bristled fiercely.

"That's just what I mean! You did that to get even with me for the little affair of last night."

"You're a liar!" Taulbee shouted, fairly beside himself with rage.

He had scarcely given utterance to the offensive epithet before he found himself rolling in the sticky mud, having been knocked flat by a blow from the sport's fist.

It seemed for an instant that there would be a fight, for the foreman scrambled to his feet wild with humiliation and anger. But the friends of Stuttering Sam closed so firmly and so determinedly around their leader that the bridge foreman and his men thought better of it, and growlingly retired from the scene.

And Stuttering Sam, after placing a guard over the mine, returned to the city to take measures to repair, as well as he could, the injury done to his property.

CHAPTER VII.

FLAME-GIRDLED.

THERE is something fascinating in an ancestral estate; and this is particularly true when the estate, held by stranger hands, seems as if it would become once more the family inheritance.

Cerro Cenci, mounted on a broncho that was not overly well broken, had been for two days looking over the vast extent of grazing lands which were once his father's, and which he one day hoped to call his own.

These lands consisted of mountains and mesa, together with some rich, low-lying valleys, where, with irrigation, crops ought to grow bountifully. Much of the country was very beautiful, and even the pebbly sand wastes were not without a certain picturesqueness and charm, for the vari-colored pebbles, lying closely together on the ground, presented a rich mosaic.

Cenci had dreamed dreams of coming greatness as he rode slowly over this ancestral territory, admiring its views, and speculating as to its probable worth in coined dollars.

"But I shall never sell it," he had told himself. "No; if I once come into possession of it, as I believe I shall, I shall stock it with ranches and proceed to open and develop the mines. I shouldn't want to live in a prettier country; and this estate properly administered and superintended, ought to yield a revenue fit for a prince."

Two days scarcely sufficed to permit him to view it and note all its charms, but two days was all he could spare to the agreeable task.

He had found work proceeding in two of the mines; two that were supposed to contain the heaviest bodies of ore. But the work was done after a slovenly, wasteful fashion that irritated him. Besides, it is not pleasant to feel that another is taking the wealth that rightfully belongs to one's self.

Having extended his survey much beyond the limits originally intended, he reluctantly turned in the direction of Santa Fe. Even then, though knowing that he ought to hasten, he permitted his broncho to leisurely pick its way, while he became lost in reflective reveries.

He had reached a region where the pasturage was of the finest, the bunch-grass being thickly set and more than two feet in height, and was speculating as to the probable number of cattle the range would graze, when the sharp skr-r-r of a rattlesnake sounded just beneath the broncho's feet. The animal snorted loudly, wheeled with a quick short turn that flung its rider to the ground, and leaped away like a shot.

Cenci was tossed near enough to the rattlesnake to give him a thrill of fear and to cause a chilly sensation to sweep over him.

And, too, the shock of the fall and the rough tumble were anything but pleasant.

He arose, slightly angered; and muttering maledictions on the rattlesnake and on the idiocy of the horse, sought a club with which to slay the reptile.

He could find nothing but a piece of branching mesquite, and with this returned to the point where the snake was still rattling furiously.

It was but the work of a few moments to dispatch the snake; and then Cenci turned and looked for the recreant broncho.

It had apparently recovered from its fright; but was a full half-mile away, and trotting along as if it had no intention of ever stopping.

He had not anticipated difficulty in catching it; but seeing it was headed in the homeward direction, fears on that point began to trouble his mind.

To be thus left alone in the desert was not a thing to be desired. His blankets and what little food he had were strapped to the saddle on the pony's back. Even his revolver, his sole weapon and means of obtaining game, was in the saddle holster.

Realizing what it might mean to be thus abandoned, he dropped the mesquite bough, and raced after the retreating animal, calling loudly to it as he ran.

He was a good runner, but in a race of this kind he knew he must be finally distanced, unless the pony should hearken to his voice or stop to graze.

Ten miles ahead there was a creek; and no doubt the pony when it reached this water would stop to drink. But Cenci could not hope to keep close enough to it to take advantage of this.

So he ran as fleetly as possible, thinking to come up with it by a sharp burst of speed.

When he drew within a few hundred yards of the troncho, however, it discovered it was being chased, and broke into a run that left him in despair. This pace it kept up until it was a mere speck in the sea of bunch-grass; and then passed from sight behind a grove.

Cenci was so chagrined that he could have cried, if that had been the proper and manly thing to do. Instead, he tried to choke down his indignation and regret and to seriously consider the condition in which he was placed.

He was forced to confess that the outlook was not cheering; and being heated by his unwonted exertions, for it was now high noon, he looked about for a place where he might rest and think.

There were a few scattered mesquite trees, and beneath one of these he crept, brushing the thorns from the ground, and mopping his streaming face with his handkerchief.

He felt like giving over to despair. Many weary miles lay between him and Santa Fe; and if there was a house of any description in the intervening region he was not aware of it.

But after a time he ceased to think of his present predicament and permitted his mind to wander along the roseate paths it had lately been traversing;—and thus prone on his back he stared up at the few fleecy clouds that floated in the azure sky and dreamed of the time to come when he should not be merely the claimant but the owner of the old Cenci estate.

So pleasant and so soothing were these reflections that he fell asleep, finally.

He was aroused by the smell of smoke; and sitting bolt upright, and wide awake on the instant, he looked around to see from whence it came.

The sight he beheld was well calculated to fill him with terror. Fire had broken out in the bunch-grass, how he could not conjecture—and was now racing toward him, perilously near.

It formed a vast semicircle; or, more correctly speaking, the two sides of a huge triangle. The apex of the triangle was in the direction from which the wind came, and the sides stretched on either hand to a considerable distance beyond him. It seemed that these two wings must soon unite; and then the triangle would be transformed into a circle and he would be girt in by flames.

Already the heat of the fire came to him, and the dense cloud of smoke was bewildering and suffocating. It seemed almost useless to run, yet that appeared to be the only thing he could do. If he had had some matches he would have endeavored to start a back fire and thus protect himself; but his match-case had gone with the broncho.

The bunch-grass was of sufficient height to make an extremely hot fire; a fire so hot that he knew if caught by it he would be roasted alive, or, at least, burned horribly; and he therefore started to run, hoping against hope that he might pass beyond the arms of the triangle.

He did not question what he should do should he not succeed in thus breaking through. He dared not question; for to question meant to doubt, and to doubt meant death. The formation of the circle and the burning over of the ground whereon he now stood would not stop the sweep of the flames. So long as there was a breeze to fan them and grass to burn they would sweep

on; and he must be a fleet runner indeed who could hope to outstrip them.

He shrunk from reasoning this out, however, and started to do the only thing he knew to do: which was to run, and run and run until he should drop in his tracks, and the flames should curl over him and transform his living, breathing body into a mass of blackened flesh.

Thus impelled, he gave himself to a wild, frenzied outburst of speed, which in the very nature of things could do little good and must be of short duration.

Panting and perspiring, choked by the thick-coming smoke, and with his eyes hot and strained to the point of bursting, he rushed on, not daring to look back, and fearing to look before.

Help was at hand, however, although he did not know it. Between the wings of flame, straight into this caldron of fire, raced two horses. One of them was riderless; the other bore on his back a young woman. Neither of the animals was saddled; yet the young woman maintained her seat firmly and gracefully, and guided her steed with a skill that showed her to be an accomplished equestrienne.

Cerro Cenci, gasping and reeling and with the mist swimming before his eyes, saw through the smoky air this would-be rescuer. The vision filled him with new life and hope. Coming from he knew not whence, and appearing at so opportune a time, she seemed more like an angel flown down from the skies than a mere creature of flesh and blood.

With a wild cry he ran toward her, waving his hat; and she responded by urging her horses to even greater exertions.

The flames were drawing nearer and nearer, seeming to reach out their fiery hands as if to drag them down to death; and every moment the atmosphere became hotter and more stifling.

Closer and closer drew the bounding horses; and Cerro Cenci could even hear the young woman's voice as she shouted some directions to him, though he could not make out the words.

He had forgotten his fatigue and his despair, for the new hope that had come to him brought back all his strength and seemed to give wings to his feet.

With a last bound the horses were at his side, and were reined in with so quick and firm a hand as to be almost thrown on their haunches.

"Mount!" she cried. "There's no time for explanations, and an introduction is out of the question. The fire will be on us in a little while."

Her face was flushed and her eyes shone with the intense excitement. Her dress—she did not have on a riding habit—was covered with dust and flecked with foam from the mouths of the horses.

Cenci did not wait for a second invitation, but scrambled as quickly as possible to the back of the riderless animal.

Then the young woman wheeled her horse about, gave it free rein, and started for the narrowing gap in the fire-line.

Except at this opening, which was now only a few hundred yards in width, the triangle had been changed into a complete circle; and these two points of flame were rushing toward each other with seemingly the speed of an Express train and the roar of a tornado.

The horses were already well blown; but they were fleet-footed creatures, and bent to their task so willingly that it seemed they understood the character and danger of the situation.

Cerro Cenci, much as he desired to do so, was not given time for a second look at his preserver, if indeed she could be called his preserver, for they were not yet out of peril.

The heat was so great as they approached the lines of fire that it fairly scorched their faces. The young woman protected herself as well as she could by twisting a flimsy shawl about her head; but she had nothing to offer Cenci, and he was compelled to pass through the fiery ordeal as best he could, bending his head to it as one bends to a gale.

For an instant it seemed that in this race of life and death they would be defeated; and if the animals had not been obedient to the rein and of the best possible mettle this would undoubtedly have been the case, for the lapping flames roared and hissed and crackled apparently only a hand's breadth away as the horses tore through the opening.

But the race was won, though neither Cenci nor his rescuer could consider themselves safe, for, a long stretch of grass country now opened before them and the fire was crowding closely at their heels.

"This way!" said the young woman, when the lines of fire had been safely passed, wheeling her animal sharply to the right. "We're being driven out of the route we must take."

Cenci obeyed without question, keeping his horse close at the side of the other.

"Now, we are safe!" she asserted, when a mile had been swiftly ridden over.

The roar of the flames had ceased to deaden all other sounds, and the heat was perceptibly less.

The animals labored heavily and were much distressed, and she gave the signal to slacken the pace.

"I live in that spur of hills," she explained, noting the inquiring look on the young man's face. "That is, I am staying there temporarily. I saw you, more than an hour ago, when you first entered the grass land, and before the fire started."

She smiled slightly at his start of surprise.

"There are never very many objects on these plains. Once in a while some game, a bunch of cattle, or a stray cowboy; and so, when I saw you, I took the liberty of looking you over with my binocular."

"I saw the fire start, too; saw it gain on you, and saw you try to escape. I was looking at you when your horse threw you; and knew that on foot you could never beat the fire."

"And so I got out these horses as quick as I could, and came to your assistance."

Cenci was about to overwhelm her with his thanks.

"No thanks are needed," she asserted. "There's the gap in the hills. Spur your horse up a little, and we'll soon be where we can rest in security."

CHAPTER VIII.

CATCHING A SPY.

THE young lady who had rescued Cerro Cenci from the fire was a self-reliant beauty, of the blonde type, with calm blue eyes that had a faculty of looking one through and through. It is scarcely necessary to assert that she was as brave as she was self-reliant, in view of the manner in which her courage had been so recently put to the test.

Cerro Cenci could not help but think well of her, for she had saved him from death or a worse fate; and as he accompanied her to the dwelling in the low-lying spur of hills, the glances of her blue eyes did much to change this feeling of regard into something warmer and stronger.

She introduced herself naively, saying that she was Miss Nevada Simpson, and that her father was Jones Simpson, the well-known real-estate agent and cattleman, and that the ranges beyond the hills belonged to her father, and she was spending a few days at the ranch-house.

There was no one there, now, she said, but a servant woman, as the cowboys were temporarily away, and her father was in the city.

Cenci, in the few days he had been in Santa Fe, had heard much of Jones Simpson, who was known there as an indefatigable boomer, and a "rustler" of daring and skill. He was engaged in half the real estate speculations in the city, and seemed to be constantly seeking for new worlds to conquer.

It did not lessen Cenci's admiration for Miss Nevada to know that her father was so prominent a man.

When the ranch-house was gained, Cenci found it a low, wooden structure, large and roomy, rather bare upon the outside, but fairly well-furnished within.

The servant woman, who had known of Miss Nevada's efforts to save the stranger, and who had been extremely anxious for the result, came out to welcome them.

Notwithstanding the fact that the three were alone in the big house, Miss Nevada managed to make things very pleasant for Cerro Cenci. Perhaps it was because they were so much alone—for the servant was engaged in compounding a number of mysterious dishes in the dim recesses of the kitchen the greater portion of the time—that the hours flew so swiftly and so pleasantly.

About mid-afternoon one of the cowboys returned; and along in the evening Jones Simpson came in from the city, in a buggy.

Jones Simpson had just passed middle age; and was an alert, keen-eyed man, on whom multitudinous cares and the pressing demands of business had left but few traces.

"Ah!" he said, when presented to Cenci by his daughter, "and so you were really drawn out of the frying-pan—I mean out of the fire—by Nevada? It was in a good cause and the risk was justified—but that girl is the most reckless thing and she'll kill herself yet!"

His tones, as well as his manner, showed that Nevada was the delight and pride of his heart; and that he was highly pleased with the daring way in which she had saved Cenci from the flames.

"I've seen you before!" turning quickly from Nevada to Cerro. "If I'm not mistaken, I've seen you before! It was at the Golconda."

"The Golconda" was the most famous gaming resort at the time in the city of Santa Fe; and when Jones Simpson made the assertion—making it as he did in the presence of his daughter—the young man flushed painfully. Evidently Cenci did not think it a praiseworthy thing to have his name mentioned in connection with that establishment, even if the mention was made by and implicated the great Jones Simpson himself.

"I was never there but once," he said, deprecatingly, "and that was with a friend."

"Stuttering Sam?"

"No; the Hummer from Hummingbird. The Hummer is not a gamester; neither am I. We only went to see what was going on, and because the crowd went."

"That's all right!" and Simpson looked beamingly from the apologizing young man to the

smiling Miss Nevada. "I think I understand you! But some very good fellows, who ought to be ashamed of themselves, are found in the Golconda occasionally, and I am myself one of those good fellows. Make yourselves merry, while I see that my horse is properly cared for! I drove him like—the very deuce—this afternoon!"

He was off like a shot.

"Father will have his joke!" Nevada apologized, while at the same time she could not help smiling at Cenci's very evident chagrin. "It's his way; and you mustn't think anything of it."

Then she turned his thoughts into a new channel by entering upon a discussion of the mingled charms and disadvantages of life on the ranch.

Simpson came in shortly after; and from that until supper time, and even far into the night he kept his guest busy listening to recitals of Western adventure, and to stories of the wily ways of the Western boomer. Simpson was a good talker, and an intelligent, wide-awake man, who had seen much of the world, and had treasured up a considerable portion of what he had seen and heard.

He was in the midst of one of his characteristic descriptions, when they were startled by a loud call at the door, in the tones of the cowboy:

"Hello! Open up hyer. I've got a combination of a skunk and a rattlesnake out hyer that I'm blest if I know what to do with. He's got his teeth out; and if I let him go he'll pizen the neighborhood, an' if I hold on to him he's liable to bite me bad!"

Jones Simpson had sprung to his feet at the first cry; and before the words were ended he was at the door.

Cerro Cenci and Miss Nevada pressed close at his heels.

There was a lamp in the wide corridor; and its light revealed an unexpected sight, as Simpson threw the door open.

The cowboy had the noose of his lasso drawn tightly about the neck of a wizened little Mexican; and the latter had got out a knife, evidently after having been brought to the door, and was trying to stab his captor, wriggling and squirming like an eel as he did so.

"I ketches the pizen critter under the winder," the cowboy managed to gasp, as he held the Mexican at arm's length to avoid the attempted thrusts with the knife.

"Git holt of 'im, or he'll stick me, shore!"

Simpson made one bound and grasped the Mexican's knife-hand, and with a dexterous twist wrenched the knife away.

Then the three, Simpson, Cerro and the cowboy, bodily lifted the little man and carried him into the house.

"Now, sit down there!" Jones commanded, plumping the Mexican rather roughly into a big chair. "Sit down there; and tell us what you've been up to!"

The Mexican could speak English very fairly, and whined out a protest against the treatment that he had received.

"That don't explain what you are doing under my window," and Simpson frowned, severely.

"Not'ing at all!" the fellow bravely asserted.

"Now, look here!" shaking a warning forefinger at him. "That's a lie on the very face of it. You don't belong in this section; and even if you did, and had honorable motives, you wouldn't sneak up that way, but if you wanted in would come straight to a man's door and knock."

"I know you, for I've seen you in Santa Fe. You're Jason Deel's hired man, aren't you?"

The Mexican denied this vigorously.

"I know you are; but why you should be out here puzzles me."

Cerro Cenci plucked Simpson by the coat and drew him away.

"If he is in the employ of Jason Deel, I know why he is here. He has followed me. The scamp must be a regular salamander, though, to have got away from that fire."

He then hastily explained something of the causes tending to make Deel his enemy.

"You're a sneak and a spy!" said Simpson, coming back to where the Mexican sat guarded by the cowboy.

Then, turning to the latter:

"Take him outside, give him a half-dozen lashes with a stock-whip, and turn him adrift; and if he shows his ugly mug around here again, shoot him!"

Jones Simpson did not intend the commands should be obeyed literally, but meant to scare the Mexican; and no doubt he succeeded, for the cowboy obeyed the first of the commands with a right good will, and this spy of Jason Deel's made all haste to leave the dangerous vicinity.

CHAPTER IX.

WITHIN CLOISTERED WALLS.

THE visit of Jason Deel to Father Petrie was not barren of results. The priest did not have Deel's boldness, but he was in most respects a worthy ally of this arch schemer. He had told Deel that he could not forbid Clarkson Jinks access to the records.

When he made the statement he felt that it would be a task beyond his power. If he could not keep Jinks away from the records, however, Deel had given him to understand that he must by all means beat the crest-hunter in the race for the papers relating to the Cenci estate.

"Now, Father Petrie was altogether too lazy and too great a lover of his ease to enter into so heated a competition as this must be, especially when the chances were so greatly in Jinks's favor. So he set about to devise some way to overcome the difficulty.

He constantly haunted the record room, watching Clarkson's every movement, hoping for something that might give him an excuse for excluding the young man from the place.

None came; and he proceeded to make one.

One day, shortly after Jinks had departed, Petrie hurried to Father Manzantini, a look of pretended fright on his fat face.

"We must not let that man come here any more," he declared, puffing as if out of breath. "He has abstracted some papers! I don't know just what they are; but I found this on the floor."

He held up a paper wrapper which had evidently been around a package of old documents.

"There's nothing on this; no inscription to tell what it contained. I heard him leave the room just as I entered it; and when I saw this, I looked out after him and he was buttoning his coat over what I believe to be the stolen package.

It was Father Manzantini's duty to remain in the record-room during this portion of the day; and in making these charges against Clarkson, Petrie was virtually accusing his brother priest of neglecting the task assigned him.

Manzantini was in every respect the opposite of Father Petrie, being a scholarly student, unassuming and unambitious, conscientious and honorable. He flushed under Petrie's incrimination.

"I always believed Clarkson to be a just and true man," he said, gravely. "There can be no mistake about this?"

He looked intently at the paper.

"It is as I say," Petrie ill-temperedly snarled.

"The man shall not come here any more. The papers of San Muerto are valuable; they are the records of the holy church!"

"I only left him in there for a few minutes," Manzantini said, apologetically.

It was the only defense he could make. He had trusted Clarkson Jinks implicitly; and it hurt him sore to think for an instant that this trust had been abused.

"I will speak to him!" he promised.

And when Clarkson Jinks came the next day to make further search for the Cenci papers he found that it was to be his last visit.

For an hour or more he worked; then his face lighted as he unrolled a package—the package he had been looking for.

"May I take this with me?" he asked, as he held the package in his trembling fingers. "I should much like to transcribe the papers it contains."

Then Manzantini sadly informed him of the charges preferred by Father Petrie, and of the decision which had been reached.

"And I cannot come any more?"

"No!"

"Nor copy these papers?"

"I am sorry; but neither can be done!" and there was a look of pain on Manzantini's fine features. "I cannot believe what has been told of you; but under the circumstances I do not feel that I have any liberty in the matter."

The crest-hunter voiced an indignant denial; but Father Manzantini, while kind, was inflexible.

"It's too bad!" the Hummer asserted, when he had patiently listened to Clarkson's story. "And you had just found the papers? I'll warrant you that that old devil, Deel, is at the bottom of the whole business. I've learned that he and Father Petrie are almost too thick to thrive."

"Well, he laughs best who laughs last! We have discovered that the papers are in there, and that's a good point; for, let me tell you, there's more ways of getting into a place than through the door and when the sun is shining."

Clarkson Jinks stared. Obviously he did not catch the Hummer's meaning.

"I'll have to make it clearer, eh?" with a toss of the head that made the cuckoo wings flutter. "My gentle innocent! My sucking dove! You have surely just come out of the woods. Now that you know where those papers are, I presume you could put your hands on them in the darkness as well as in the daylight; and if it should become necessary we might strike a match. What's to hinder us from climbing into that old barn and getting that package without so much as asking Father Petrie?"

"You mean enter by night? Surreptitiously?"

"That's just what I mean. They have no right to withhold those papers. There's the revelation of a gigantic crime hidden in them; and they've no right to link the Mission with wrong-doing in any such way. If matters were different, I should be opposed to going in there by stealth quite as much as you appear to be.

But Petrie and Jason Deel are in a conspiracy to keep Cenci out of his rights; and so I consider this, or any other means to accomplish the end, perfectly justifiable."

"I can't say that I like it," and Clarkson pulled nervously at his sandy mustache. "If we should be caught it would just everlastingly ruin my business."

"It's ruined any way!" looking coolly at him.

"If you're debarred from the Mission, you can never compile any more coats-of-arms and things of that sort for the purse-proud Dons of New Mexico."

There was a troubled look in the pale eyes of the young crest-hunter.

"I'll have to do as you say; but I'm getting snarled up in a way that I don't like. I'm working for you and Cenci on conditions. If Cenci gets back his lands I won't need to make any more lineage records for these questionable heirs of the Montezumas. I can live very well without it. But—"

"If we fail, you will still be poor and proud and good-looking, like your humble servant. But, my dear fellow, we're not going to fail. Like good, old Eli, we're going to get there, and don't you forget it!"

There was no resisting the persuasive powers of the Hummer from Hummingbird, and that night, just on the stroke of twelve, the two found themselves beneath the walls of the San Muerto Mission, fully prepared for their risky undertaking. They had a light ladder with them, some matches and a dark lantern.

"Looks a little like burglary, this does," Clarkson whispered, as he proceeded to hoist the ladder against the wall.

"It does," the Hummer confessed. "But, whatever it looks like, we are in for it now. So, up with you!"

When they had gained the top of the wall—for the Mission proper was shut in by a walled inclosure—they drew up the ladder and lowered it on the other side.

When they had descended, they drew the ladder down and concealed it.

Then they made their way toward the record-room.

The Mission slept peacefully under the shadows of night, and there was not a sound to break the oppressive stillness.

The window of the record-room was not difficult to hoist, notwithstanding its weight. The grooves were old and had been worn smooth by much sliding.

They crept into the room, feeling very uncomfortable and very guilty, and the Hummer, having lighted the lantern, flashed its rays on the shelves.

Clarkson Jinks put up his hand for the package. He uttered a little cry. The papers were gone!

"I'm sure I placed them just there," he said, trembling at the sound of his own voice. "Some one has moved them. Perhaps it was Petrie."

"Look again," Hartsook urged. "They may have been shoved into some other shelf."

Jinks began a hurried search, disarranging papers which he had to place back again, and looking everywhere for the missing package.

At last his hands fell on it, and he was about to place it in his pocket—when a door entering from the main building was opened, and Father Petrie stood before them. Never were two men more surprised and astounded. Jinks turned white as a sheet; and even the redoubtable Hummer was so startled that he came near letting the lantern slip from his fingers.

He retained sufficient presence of mind, however, to turn off the light, thus plunging the room in total darkness.

But before they could take a step, they heard the rush of many feet through the doorway where Petrie stood—and a number of men sprang on them.

Resistance was useless; and they were quickly overpowered and bound. Then a candle was brought and the light flashed into their faces.

"Treacherous dogs!" hissed the priest, glowering savagely at them. "Is it thus you repay my kindness? I ought to have you tied up and flogged."

The Mexicans who stood about them, ready to do the priest's bidding, indicated by their fiery glances that they would like nothing better than to be delegated to the work.

Hartsook and Jinks said nothing—they had nothing to say.

Petrie snatched the package from the floor where it had fallen, and concealed it in the folds of his gown.

"Away with them!" he commanded. "I don't believe they will attempt this trick again! If they should, we will know what to do with them next time."

The Mexicans grasped the Hummer and his companion, and bore them roughly from the place and beyond the Mission walls. Nor did they stop until the limits of the city were passed.

On the barren sands of the plain they left them, tightly bound, with no companions but the night wind and the stars; and there they remained until relieved by a friendly wayfarer on the following morning.

CHAPTER X.

LED INTO A TRAP.

IN the days immediately following the wrecking of the mine the knowledge came to Stuttering Sam that Jason Deel was really the man who had planned and directed the dastardly work.

It aroused within him a hot desire to even the score.

Deel was a frequenter of the Golconda; and one night the sport managed to draw him into a game of cards where the betting was high. Deel was no novice; but as Stuttering Sam had resolved to worst him, and put forth every art to do so, the result was what might have been anticipated.

Deel arose from the table poorer by several thousand dollars; and with a white and ghastly face staggered from the room. He had fancied himself a good player; had fought hard and died game; hoping in the end to over-reach and ruin the sport. The money that had passed that night from his possession into Stuttering Sam's crippled him more than he would have cared to confess even to his most intimate associate.

This was the first playing Stuttering Sam had done since the day of the great bull-fight; and he would not have handled the papers then had not an intense desire for revenge overcome him. His infatuation for Juanita Concha had tended to ennoble him, and cause him to look upon the gambling profession as a most degrading business, which he would fain escape.

As he got up from the table and looked after the retreating form of Deel, to his astonishment he saw in the doorway the very woman of whom he had been thinking.

"Juanita Concha!" he thought, grasping the bar for support, while his brain swum. "What can she be doing here?"

She seemed to be looking at him with sad and reproachful eyes; and the iron of condemnation went straight to his heart.

After giving him that upbraiding look, she turned quickly and vanished.

Moved by a sudden impulse, Stuttering Sam stepped quickly to the door. Looking down the street, he saw the girl again, hurrying in the direction of the Mission school.

His mind was in a whirl. Why had Juanita Concha come to the Golconda? he again asked himself. Why had she cast on him that reproachful look? Was it in reproof?

He determined to solve the mystery if he could; and so he passed into the street, and in the direction taken by the girl. He walked rapidly at first, thinking to come up with her, and give her an opportunity to speak to him if she desired. Perhaps that was why she had come to the gaming-room. The thought stirred him.

Once he stopped and hesitated, half-resolved to turn back. To thus follow a woman seemed to him a sneaking business; and whatever else Stuttering Sam may have been he was not a sneak. He could not quite make up his mind to do this, however, and hastened on.

She had walked so fast that the vicinity of the mission was reached before he came in sight of her again. She had halted, and was standing hesitatingly, as if waiting for him to come up.

"It's a f-funny b-business for her to b-be out here in the night, anyw-w-way!" he muttered to himself, as he rested for a moment in the shadows to observe her. "It's a-against all the rules of the M-Mission. I wonder if-if-if the worthy f-fathers know anyth-thing about it. I'll bet a p-pewter button they don't. And that's not like Juanita to go ro-roaming the str-streets without permission!"

The girl had looked warily around; and then, seeming to be satisfied with the survey, walked on again.

"I'm a b-b-blamed idiot!" Sam growled. "N-now, do you s-s-s-suppose that sh-she could have been waiting for me? It l-looks like it; and y-yet the v-very idea seems ridiculous!"

Almost cursing himself for being a fool, he yet moved after the girl again as she walked on in the direction of the Mission gate. He had convinced himself that he was doing a very absurd thing, and was heartily ashamed of himself for doing it, yet was powerless to resist the temptation.

There were few houses in the neighborhood of the Mission, and these only adobes of the humbler sort, occupied by the poorer classes. One of these adobes was near the point where the girl had stopped but a moment before.

She had vanished again, for the shadows were thick near the Mission walls; but having foolishly entered upon this chase, Stuttering Sam was resolved to see it to the end.

As he came opposite the adobe, he thought he heard a rustling in the darkness at its side, and involuntarily halted to ascertain what it meant.

As he did so, a rope, the end of which was held in the hands of men concealed in the gloom by the adobe, was jerked; and a noose, within whose circle Stuttering Sam had inadvertently set his feet, closed with a swish around his ankles; and he was jerked headlong to the ground.

The whole thing had been so entirely unexpected that he was unable to offer any resistance to the pull of the rope; and came down so heavily that the breath was fairly knocked out of him.

Nevertheless, he retained his presence of mind; and scrambling to his feet, attempted to draw a revolver and prepare for an attack. But one of the men who had noosed him began to jerk sharply on the rope which was still about his ankles, and he could do nothing.

He saw some of the men hurry from the shadows; and feeling that he must escape, he drew his pocket-knife and severed the rope. But before he could do anything else the men were upon him, and he was compelled to fight at a great disadvantage.

The first words spoken by the assailants showed that they were led by Tom Taulbee, the bridge foreman.

That Taulbee had good reasons to hate him, Stuttering Sam knew. Then, even while so sorely pressed, a series of perplexing questions crowded on him.

Manifestly these men had been awaiting his coming, and had prepared the noose for his especial benefit. But how had they known he would come at all? Surely, Juanita Concha could not be in league with such rascals!

That was not to be thought of. True, Juanita Concha was, to a large extent, under the control of Father Petrie; Petrie was an ally of Deel's; and the bridge foreman was Deel's most willing tool. But all this proved nothing.

Stuttering Sam did not think out these questions and surmises as they are here set down. He had no time for that. Yet there can be no doubt that in a hazy, indistinct way they came to him, even as he parried the blows of Taulbee and his henchmen.

Having the advantage of surprise and numbers, the scoundrels were pressing him hard; and though he might make a gallant fight, he could neither hope to worst them nor to escape. All he could do would be to battle to the bitter end.

He had a revolver in his pocket, but he was not given time to get at it; and his only other weapon, the pocket-knife, had been stricken from his grasp at the first rush. And thus he was left weaponless.

Taulbee and his men, on the other hand, although they had the power, seemed not to have the desire to slay him. What they appeared to be attempting was to overwhelm and bear him down by force of numbers, and tie him with the rope. This they would undoubtedly have accomplished had not another appeared upon the scene.

This was the gladiator, Manuel Garcia.

He had been standing on a street corner, a half-square above, when the girl had passed, followed shortly after by Stuttering Sam. He had wondered at this, and when they had gone by, had stood looking in the direction taken, and speculating as to what it meant. Being a Catholic, he was acquainted with the rules of the Mission, and knew that they rigidly forbade any women from being out at night; and, besides, Juanita Concha was not a girl to race around in that style, even if the rules of the institution had permitted it.

He knew Juanita well, and felt for her a brotherly interest; and this impelled him to walk slowly down the street after the retreating sport. He thought highly of Stuttering Sam, and this action on the part of the sport sorely puzzled him.

Hence, when Stuttering Sam was so abruptly set upon by Taulbee and his followers, the gladiator was not fifty paces distant.

"H-help!" Stuttering Sam cried, as he was borne down.

The gladiator responded with an encouraging shout, as he bounded to the sport's assistance. Then he laid about him in a way that was bewildering and terrifying to Taulbee's men.

Garcia, as has been said, was a man of powerful frame. He was also a trained fighter; and worth any half-dozen ordinary men on most occasions. His fists were like iron, and he swung them with the quickness and ponderousness of a trip-hammer. Whenever a blow struck, the man hit went down as if he had been kicked by a mule.

Just after giving that call for help, Stuttering Sam had been given a heavy blow on the head by some blunt weapon in the hands of Tom Taulbee; and the blow had felled him senseless.

Realizing the sort of foe they had to deal with, the ruffians came at the gladiator from all sides. But they might as well have fought an elephant. Within less than two minutes, Taulbee was the only man still on his feet and unhurt.

"I cave!" he said, as the heavy fist was again lifted. "Don't hit me!"

He threw up his hands appealingly.

The blow was stayed.

"Then clear out of this! If you are not in a hurry, too, I will strike again. *Diablo!* you are one great coward. Go! Go!"

He waved his fist menacingly; and the terrified Taulbee obeyed with as much alacrity as he could summon.

As for Taulbee's men, they had been completely knocked out. If any one of them still

retained consciousness, he had sense enough to conceal the fact.

Garcia folded his arms, and looked smilingly over the scene. Then he stepped to where Stuttering Sam was lying, and made a hasty examination of the sport's condition. There was a confusion on the head, but the other injuries seemed slight.

The sport was breathing heavily, and showed signs of returning animation.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE'S BOLDNESS.

THERE was a hospital attached to the Mission of San Muerto, and the first impulse of the honest gladiator was to bear the sport there. So, without further thought, he lifted the insensible form to his broad shoulders, and staggered with the heavy burden toward the Mission gate.

To Taulbee's men he gave not a moment's heed. While his blows had been heavy, he knew he had not struck hard enough to inflict serious injury. They would come around all right in a little while; and no doubt Taulbee would return, with friends to their assistance.

The Mission gate was closed; but the gladiator rapped sharply and loudly thereon. The call was answered by a grumbling servitor, who came forward rubbing his eyes and not at all pleased at being thus aroused from his slumbers.

"Show me the way to the hospital wards; or stay, I can find the way myself!"

Garcia spoke in Spanish; and the servant, having now got his eyes sufficiently open to recognize the great *espada*, bowed humbly, and expressed a desire to do whatever Garcia asked.

"Shut the gate, then; and come or stay, as you like!" said the gladiator, curtly, as he bent his way in the direction of the hospital.

There was a light burning within this building, and it guided his steps through the darkness.

The servant having closed and barred the gate, now leaped lightly by him and ran on before, anxious to do homage to so great a man.

He hurried into the wards in advance of Garcia; and when the gladiator followed with his heavy burden, he found a cot prepared and everything in readiness for the reception of the injured sport.

To his surprise, Juanita Concha, herself, came forward to greet him. Hers had been the form, he knew now, that he had seen sitting by the lamp.

Her face became deathly pale as her eyes fell on the drawn features of Stuttering Sam.

"Oh! is he much hurt?" and she tremblingly clasped her hands.

Garcia did not reply in words, but bent on her a questioning look. Then he laid the insensible sport on the cot.

Juanita seemed to be engaged in nurse work that night; and while some of the older and cooler heads among the nurses brought bandages and restoratives, she fluttered about so aimlessly and helplessly that Garcia could not but note it.

"Ah! the poor girl!" he mused. "She remembers the day of the bull-fight, and how this brave man rescued her from the horns of the beast. Perhaps she fears that he will die! But he will not die. That wound on the head is what troubles him now; and I don't think it's nearly so bad as it looks."

He continued to watch the girl as she hovered over the cot unable to restrain or conceal her intense anxiety.

The work of the experienced nurses was not without good result. The breathing of the injured man became less heavy and stertorous; and shortly after, under the influence of some drug given him, he seemed to sink into a quiet and restful slumber.

"I will remain with him," Juanita said to the nurses, as the gladiator, feeling that Stuttering Sam was now safe, arose to go. "Please let me remain with him! He saved my life, you know, and so I want to do something for him."

The appeal was irresistible. Besides, there was an abundance of work to employ all in the various wards. So, Juanita Concha was left alone to watch with the sleeping man.

It was morning when Stuttering Sam came out of his deep sleep of unconsciousness. Before he opened his eyes he lay quietly for a few moments striving to recall what had befallen him. That it was something out of the usual he knew.

His head throbbed with a dull pain; and when he put up his hand he found that it was bandaged and felt sore to the touch. In addition, every muscle in his body ached intensely.

He opened his eyes and recognized the white-washed walls of the San Muerto Mission. Then everything came back to him with the quickness of thought: The card-duel with Jason Deel in the rooms of the Golconda; the sudden appearance and reproachful looks of Juanita Concha; the pursuit of her through the dark streets; the tripping noose, the fight with Taulbee's men, and the crushing blow that brought blackness and blankness.

He glanced around and his eyes fell on Juanita, the woman he loved, and the one who had apparently led him into the trap that came

so near being fatal. She was dressed in sober black, wore a hooded, white bonnet, and her face was pale with anxiety and watching.

She saw that Stuttering Sam had aroused from his long slumber; and as his looks fell on her, she arose and glided quietly away.

He had desired to speak to her, and felt the disappointment, keenly. He tried to call her back, but she had vanished into one of the other wards.

A multitude of questions he wanted to propound to her swarmed upon him; but the influence of the drug that had lulled him to sleep the night before was still potent; and after wandering for a time in a mazy land of doubt and wonder, he again closed his eyes and became lost to matters of sense.

When he awoke again, Juanita was bending over the cot, softly arranging the pillow. One little white hand rested for a moment near his face; and with a boldness that startled him, and which a moment later filled him with regret, he drew it to his lips and imprinted on it a kiss.

The effect was electrical. With lightning quickness the hand was withdrawn, and the girl darted away like a scared fawn.

"I'm a b-blooming idiot!" he stammered, as he gazed wistfully after her retreating figure. "I really h-haven't enough sense to t-take c-care of myself. Now I've frightened her, and she won't come back again. S-somebody ought to g-give me an-another rap on the head that w-would s-settle me for good!"

He felt that he had committed a blunder—even an unpardonable sin, but regrets were useless. All he could do was to resolve to be more circumspect in the future.

For a long time he lay there, tossing and moaning, and cursing himself for the blunder he had committed; wondering the while if he would get to see her before he left the hospital.

The stabbing pain in the head was slowly passing away, and the swelling had practically disappeared. He felt that he was not so badly hurt but that he would be able to leave before night. He would have got up then, for he was not a man to lie quietly in bed when he could possibly do otherwise, but that the hope that Juanita might soon return restrained him.

This hope was not groundless; for she did return, after an hour had passed, and seated herself as quietly and demurely by the cot as if nothing had occurred to startle her.

"You are better," she said, looking gravely at him. "I heard the Sister Superior say you would be able to leave soon."

He returned her look, and fancied there were indications of regret in her eyes and in her voice.

Now, Stuttering Sam had resolved to learn wisdom by his experience of a short time ago. He had resolved to be composed and to restrain himself. But he lost his head again, as he looked into those soulful eyes.

Ever since the hour in which he had dared so much for her sake he had longed to be with her and to speak to her, if only for a few brief moments. With this desire he had haunted the streets in the vicinity of the Mission. Here was the opportunity. It might never return. Should he let it pass unimproved?

"Y-you were at the G-Golconda last night?" he began.

Her cheeks flushed.

"I?" she faltered.

"You c-came and stood in the door; and looked in m-my direction, d-did you not?"

Her face was blank with questioning astonishment.

"And I th-thought you d-desired to see me; —to s-speak with me; and so wh-when you left the p-place I followed you; and was set on by a lot of s-scoundrels, and received this!"

He lifted a hand to his injured head.

With wide-open eyes she stared at him, seeming not to understand the meaning of his words.

"It was y-you, was it not?" puzzled by her manner.

"I?" she faltered again. "I have not been outside of the Mission for two days."

It was his turn to look astonished.

"Y-you wasn't at the Golconda l-last night?"

She shook her head negatively.

"Then, M-Miss Concha, I c-certainly saw your ghost!"

Juanita Concha shivered as he made this assertion, for she was a bit superstitious.

"I c-certainly did!" he repeated. "Y-you w-were dressed just as y-you are now."

"It wasn't me!" she declared, emphatically.

Stuttering Sam sunk back on the cot, perfectly stupefied. He could not doubt her word; and yet, if he had not seen her at the Golconda, who had he seen? Who was the woman he had followed through the darkness? What was the mystery back of all this?

He turned to Juanita again.

"Whoever it was, I th-thought it was you! I have been w-wanting to speak to y-you for a long time, Miss C-Concha; in fact ever since the bull-fight."

She moved uneasily, and made as if she meant to go.

"D-don't go yet," he pleaded. "I m-may not get to see you again s-soon; and there's some-

thing I w-would say to you—must s-say to you."

To an onlooker, had there been one, there would have been something ludicrous as well as pitifully pathetic in the scene; and the pathos of it would have driven all sense of the ludicrous out of the mind. The sport's face was a study, as he struggled between his desires and his fears. He felt humiliated and awkward. His stammering speech was an embarrassment; he felt degraded by his calling in the eyes of this pure, sweet woman; and, in addition, he could not feel at ease lying in bed and with his head bandaged so that his features were almost unrecognizable.

He stretched out a hand appealingly.

"You m-must hear what I have to say, Miss C-Concha! I sh-shall not detain you. But I m-must sp-speak what I have f-felt every hour and every m-minute since I first s-saw you. From that m-moment to this I h-have l-loved you as I never loved any other woman."

Her face was so flaming red that it seemed to burn; yet there was no trace of anger; rather, she seemed pained and hurt.

"You must not talk to me that way!" she said, hastily rising. "I think much of you, for you saved my life; but not in that—that way. You forget who and what I am. I must go now. I am sure the Sister Superior needs me."

She hastened away, leaving Stuttering Sam with feelings that are well-nigh indescribable.

"I've off-fended her!" he cried. "Sh-she'll not come here any more, and I may never get to see her again. Why couldn't I have held m-my tongue?"

The work had been done, however, and wailings were of no avail. What had been said could not be unsaid; and it is a question if Stuttering Sam, after having looked keenly into his own heart, would really have desired to unsay them.

Juanita Concha had scarcely left the room, when Father Petrie came in. He had not been told of Stuttering Sam's presence in the ward, and his face darkened with malignity as his eyes fell on him.

He did not speak, however, and shortly afterward passed out.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GULF BETWEEN.

STUTTERING SAM had much to think about as he lay there on the cot, after Father Petrie's departure. He kept hoping Juanita would return, although he felt she would do nothing of the kind.

Finally, although feeling very weak and giddy, he got up and dressed himself. He was sitting on the side of the cot, when Father Manzan-tini came in.

The priest took the chair which Juanita had occupied.

"You are better?" he said, his kind face lighting.

"Much better," replied the sport. "I was th-thinking of going soon. Before I d-do, though, I must th-thank you for the kindness I have received here; and whatever the ch-charges are, I'm willing to p-pay them."

"There are no charges."

"To m-members of your faith, I pr-presume; but to a str-stranger like me?"

"This place is for all who need it," Manzan-tini replied. "It is intended especially for the members of our church; but we turn no one away, and we make no charges. If any are inclined to contribute to its support, they are at liberty to do so."

The sport drew out a shining gold-piece and slipped it into the priest's hand.

"D-do as you like with it."

"It will go into the treasury of the church. And, now, I have something I would say to you."

He looked about to assure himself they were entirely alone. Then he bent forward, and spoke in low tones:

"I would warn you against some of the dangers which threaten you. Many things have been revealed to me in confession, lately, which have pained me and grieved my heart. Your life is in peril every moment; as are also the lives of your friends, Mr. Hartsook, Mr. Jinks and others. My priestly vows forbid that I should tell what has been revealed to me in the secrecy of the confessional; and I cannot, therefore, enter into details. But I would warn you."

Stuttering Sam would have given much to have been let into the secrets thus made known to the priest. He knew that perils beset him, and had some idea of the direction from which they might be expected to come. He wondered if Manzan-tini suspected Father Petrie, or knew anything of that priest's baseness.

"I would advise that you leave this place," and the worthy father spoke slowly and earnestly. "If you go away from here harm cannot come to you. And your friends should go away. Those of whom I have spoken, who have evil in their hearts, I have urged and warned to abandon their wicked ways. But, ah me! I fear they will not. They are children of the Evil One."

"You have s-seen Juanita?" the sport ques-

tioned, his thoughts turning to her, even while listening to the counsel of the priest.

"She is a good girl!" said Manzan-tini. "What of her?"

"C-can you tell me if she remained in the b-b-b-building all of last evening? I th-thought I saw her at the G-Golconda."

Manzan-tini's face showed amazement.

"You must have been mistaken," he declared. "I am sure she was not outside the walls of the Mission. There is a keeper at the gate; and if she had gone out, he would have reported so flagrant an act of disobedience."

"It c-couldn't have been her," Stuttering Sam confessed, "and yet at the time I could have sw-sworn to h-her identity. It was h-her very im-image th-that I saw. She s-says, herself, that she w-was not out, of here; and I'm b-bound to believe her."

Father Manzan-tini was puzzled. It was the first he had heard of the strange appearance at the Golconda.

"No, I'm not out of my h-head," noting Manzan-tini's keen and inquiring glances. "I've got a pre-pretty good rap, but my br-brain is as clear as ever, I as-as-assure you!"

"You'll go away from here?" Manzan-tini asked, not able to make anything of the perplexing question, and recurring to the sport's danger.

"I c-can't, and that's the tr-truth of it. I'm b-bound here; tied, as you m-may say. I couldn't get away if I w-wanted to ever so bad; and I d-don't want to."

"Then, be watchful. Be like the serpent; for those of whom I've spoken will strike like serpents."

Having given this advice, Manzan-tini went into another ward, leaving the sport to his own reflections.

The conversation seemed to have done him good, for he arose from the cot shortly, and seeking the Sister Superior thanked her for the kindness he had received while within the hospital; and then made his way past the guardian of the gate, and on into the busy streets of the town.

He was not unobserved, however, as he left the inclosing walls. Within a cloistered room, from which only a slit of a window looked out, sat Juanita Concha; and her eyes followed the sport as he slowly made his way from the place.

She scarcely dared permit herself to think. This man had poured into her ears words such as she had never heard before; and she sat there, cowering and shrinking, frightened at her own thoughts.

Why had he done this? she asked herself. Why had he allowed himself to dream of love for her? She, who from her earliest years had been trained for the sacred work of a nun. True, she was not a nun, but if she lived she expected to be one.

Her life was dedicated to the service of the church. To it she was wedded. It would be sacrilege to sever the bonds that bound her to it—to all its sacred labors and memories—and give her affections elsewhere.

Yet, need there be any transfer of the affections? Need she abandon the church and its blessed work if she should choose to love and wed this man? So far she was held by no irrevocable vows. She was at liberty to at any time cast aside the sable of her garments.

But was she at liberty? The Mission of San Muerto had nurtured her from infancy, and to it she owed her first love and obedience.

Did she care for this man? she questioned. He had risked his life for hers; and that was a strong cord binding her to him. But that was not love—not the love a woman gives to the man she would marry. That was gratitude, thankfulness; nothing more.

Yet she was aware that within her inmost heart there was for this man a feeling stronger than that of mere thankfulness. She feared to ask herself what it was; to question too closely as to its character.

She had heard evil things spoken of Stuttering Sam. He was a sport and a gambler, and no doubt many deeds of wickedness might be justly charged against him. When he fancied he saw her, he was in the Golconda—a place she had always heard mentioned as a vile resort. And he had believed that she could come to such a place!

No, he was not the man for her, she was resolved on that. She must fight down this feeling that seemed to be taking possession of her; must crowd it out of her thoughts as she would any other suggestion of evil. Even in her wildest dreams she must not taint herself with so much as a thought of linking herself with a wicked man and an unbeliever.

And having reached this resolute determination, she descended to the hospital wards, firmly decided to banish from her mind all consideration of the questions that troubled her.

CHAPTER XIII.

BLOTTED OUT BY FIRE.

CLARKSON JINKS was made of stern stuff, though one might not have thought it to look at him. It was not always easy to persuade him into any particular course. But having once entered on that course he went resolutely for-

ward. Having put his hand to the plow he never looked back.

It was so in the present instance. He had given to Hartsook and Cenci his loyal allegiance, and thenceforth their interests and work were his.

It was not pleasant to lie out on the sands through the chilly night, trussed up like a fowl ready for basting. There had been nothing pleasant connected with his and Hartsook's visit to the Mission that night! He had opposed the burglarious character of the work, and it woefully miscarried. But he felt that he was not to blame for the miscarriage. He had gone there under protest, and had obeyed Hartsook's commands to the letter.

The failure, however, did not discourage him. He had come off without injury, having only suffered from the scare and fright.

If only Petrie had delayed his coming! Five minutes more and they would have been safe outside with the precious papers.

Ah! those papers. He was resolved to have them. He was so familiar with the appearance of the package that he believed he could readily find it now; for surely Father Petrie would not abstract it from the record room. Even though a priest, he had no right to do that.

For two days after their misadventure in the Mission he did not get to see the Hummer, the latter being temporarily away from the city. How long he might be away Clarkson did not know, and so he resolved to act alone, for he had determined to act.

Having reached a conclusion in the matter, he made his way boldly by daylight within the walls of San Muerto. He had been forbidden the place; but when he told the gate-keeper that he wished to see Father Petrie for only a few minutes he was permitted to pass.

Once inside, however, he did not go in search of Father Petrie, but made his way quietly to the hospital wards. His aim was to reach this place without attracting notice, and so well did he time his movements, and so stealthy was his approach that he succeeded beyond his most sanguine anticipations.

The ward he entered was deserted, the hospital containing but few patients at the time; and here beneath a cot placed in a dark corner he concealed himself.

"I'll get those records, or die a-trying!" he muttered, as he squeezed himself into the narrow space beneath the cot. "When I have copied them I will return them to the record room, for it wouldn't be just the white thing to rob the Mission of them. There's no good reason why I should be forbidden to make copies of them in the regular way; and I wouldn't be forbidden if there wasn't something black covered up in them."

"Phew!" and he drew out his handkerchief to mop his streaming face. "It's hot as an oven in here; and I feel more sneaking than any coyote. If one of the sisters, bless their souls, should take a fool notion to look under this bed, there would be a lively scene, sure."

The suggestion was an extremely uncomfortable one, so uncomfortable that he mopped his face more vigorously than ever, while the perspiration seemed to ooze from every pore.

As he lay there, quaking whenever a footstep entered the room, he began to question whether he had been wise after all in undertaking so desperate a venture; and he began to think that he had perhaps made a mistake in entering the service of the beguiling Hummer from Hummingbird.

The world had gone well with him before that. He had liked his work; the rich Dons were liberal and even generous in their payments; and the old records of the Mission held many things that were quaint and interesting.

All this was a thing of the past, now. If he made any more lineage records, he would have to make them entirely out of his head, as he had more than once said that he did.

When he passed through the Mission gate it was almost sundown; and the night was not now far distant. He wondered if the stupid gate-keeper would notice that he had not passed out again. If so, would he report the fact to Father Petrie?

Should that be done, a search would probably be made, and his place of concealment might be revealed. The thought made him uncomfortable.

Then, too, the record-room might be watched, and he be surprised there after the manner of his previous visit.

As soon as darkness had fallen, and before the candles were lighted, he made his way from the hospital ward to the window by which he and Hartsook had entered the record-chamber.

The window had not been secured, as he half-feared might be the case; and he was thus able to enter the room without much difficulty.

Within the room there was an old, hair-cloth lounge, on which he had seen Father Petrie lazily recline for hours at a stretch, sleepily watching him as he rummaged among the papers; and beneath this lounge he ensconced himself.

His plan was to remain there until a late hour, then obtain possession of the papers, and make his way out of the place as best he could.

When he had copied them, it would be time to devise means for their safe return.

The time dragged very slowly, more slowly it seemed than when he was hidden in the hospital; but he endeavored to possess his soul in patience and await the moment for action.

He had about resolved to begin his search, after an age, as it appeared to him, had passed; and was on the point of crawling out from under the lounge, when he was arrested by the sounds of soft footsteps.

He drew back and crowded himself more closely to the wall, for the footsteps seemed to be approaching the record-chamber.

There could be no doubt of it, a moment later. They stopped at the door; and he heard a key turn stealthily in the lock.

The door was opened and two men entered the room, whom he recognized by their voices to be Father Petrie and Jason Deel. They were speaking in whispers, but the words reached him distinctly.

He was shivering with fear as they came in, not knowing but that he had again been discovered; but their talk reassured him on that point. They were speaking of the records.

Father Petrie took down from the shelf a candlestick containing a short candle; and after satisfying himself that the curtains were closely drawn, he struck a match and applied it to the wick.

The light given out by the candle was not strong, but it was sufficient to reveal the forms and faces of the two men; and although Clarkson Jinks was not in a position favorable for seeing, he yet managed to twist himself into a posture where he could observe what was going on.

Jason Deel had complacently seated himself in a chair, while Father Petrie, candle in hand, was looking along the shelves for the precious package.

He reached it and drew it down.

"Now, you're sure you've got the right one?" Deel asked, the whispered words showing much anxiety.

"It is the one," Father Petrie assured him.

Notwithstanding this positive assertion he lingered near the shelves, as if in an uncertain frame of mind.

"What's the matter?" Deel snarled. "If you've got the right papers, why don't you bring them along?"

Manifestly Father Petrie's conscience, hardened as it was, was troubling him. He realized that he was committing a foul crime against the church he had so often dishonored.

"Is it really needful that we should do this?" he queried, still lingering near the shelves. "Surely the papers are safe here!"

"That's what you said before; and yet you know what happened the other night!"

"But it will not happen again. Those men will be afraid to come back here again. And their coming before brought no harm save to themselves."

He lifted the package as if about to replace it.

"You're an old fool!" said Deel. "What cranky superstition has got hold of you now?"

"I cannot rest of nights if I do this. The curses of all the saints will be upon me!"

"Oh, bother your saints! They don't know any more about what we're doing than does Julius Caesar."

The mocking irreverence in the tones made the priest shiver.

"Bring those papers here!" Deel sternly commanded, annoyed by Petrie's irresolution.

The priest mechanically obeyed.

"Now, sit down there, take off that wrapper, and see if we've got the papers we came for."

The tones were imperious.

Father Petrie dropped into the chair which Deel had pushed toward him, placed the candle on a little table, and with trembling fingers began to unroll the tape which held the bundle.

Clarkson Jinks, watching them from beneath the lounge, could scarcely restrain his intense excitement. His heart pounded so loudly that he fancied they must certainly hear it.

There were the papers, the very ones he had risked so much to obtain; yet, as far as he was concerned, they might as well have been beneath the depths of the ocean.

What would he not have given to have had them within his clutches? Any risk, it seemed to him, would not be too great to secure them. Once the wild thought came to him that he might, by a quick dash, grasp them and make his escape. But he put it behind him on the instant. Deel always went armed, he knew; and if not shot and killed, he could not hope to make his way out of the room in safety. And so he resolved to remain quietly where he was, and see the matter out.

When the tape had been unwound, and the wrapper removed from the package, Father Petrie spread the papers out on the little table. There were perhaps a dozen in all. He ran over them hastily.

"They are the ones," he whispered, turning to Deel.

"Then the quicker you make a bonfire of them, the better!"

The priest shivered again as if a sudden chill

had struck him. Nevertheless, he fished a large waiter from some recess, and placed the papers and the candle on it.

"Now, burn them!" and Jason Deel's voice was harsh and stern.

The priest gingerly took up the first, touched it to the flame of the candle, and then held it in his fingers until it turned to ashes.

His face was white and corpse-like, and his hands shook.

One after the other he touched the papers to the tiny flame, and watched them in a horrified, fascinated way as they were slowly consumed.

A sigh that was almost a gasp came from his lips as the ashes of the last fell in a little heap on the waiter.

"The work is done," he hoarsely whispered, bending his eyes, which were red and bloodshot, on the man who had tempted and pressed him into this deed.

"And glad I am of it!" Deel asserted. "And now that the deed is done, let us be going."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN A TIGHT PLACE.

As Jason Deel and the priest passed from the room, they, metaphorically speaking, left Clarkson Jinks tearing his hair. The burning of the records, the possession of which he had taken so much trouble to obtain, was a sore trial to him, and was all the more bitter for the reason that he could utter no protest against it.

He had not believed Father Petrie could be guilty of such baseness; but what he had seen served to reveal more clearly the depths to which the priest had descended, and the power exercised over him by his evil genius, Jason Deel.

He bitterly cursed his own dilatoriness. Why had he not made an effort to secure the papers the night before? He had lost his opportunity, and regretfully felt the truth of the proverb: "The sped arrow never returns."

Father Petrie had borne the waiter with the tell-tale ashes from the room. He had also blown out the candle, so that the place was again in total darkness.

Jinks crawled from beneath the lounge, wondering what he should now do. While his mission had been a failure, yet in a sense it would prove of value. He had ocular evidence that the Cenci records had been destroyed; and no further time need therefore be spent in that direction.

He did not know what to do, and was anxious to get the advice of the Hummer before attempting anything else.

He let himself out at the window, and then began to consider how he could make his way over the walls. Although the Mission seemed so quiet, and not a sound nor a light could be heard or seen, he knew that there were two persons within it who were alert and watchful; and that should he be discovered by Deel and Petrie it might go hard with him. Having been caught there once, he could not expect so lenient treatment should he be caught a second time.

He approached the walls and made his way slowly around them, hoping to find the ladder he and the Hummer had left. But it had been borne away.

As he could not scale the walls, he now boldly advanced to the gate.

The gate was locked, and the gate-keeper asleep in the little adobe box which he called his house.

Jinks awoke him, much to the latter's disgust.

"What is it you want?" he grumbled, rubbing his eyes as he came out and staring very hard at the disturber of his dreams.

"It is late," he protested. "You are—ah—de man what go in this evening. Why you stay in there so long. I canna let you out now."

Jinks remained as cool and unruffled as a May morning.

"I know it's against the rules. But I have been very busy. Petrie knew you'd not let me out at this time of night, and so I brought this."

He drew a letter from his pocket, and shoved it beneath the nose of the man.

"Look at that," he said, holding it so the light of the gate-keeper's lantern would fall full on the written page.

The gate-keeper was a Spaniard, and the writing was in Spanish. But the crest-hunter knew him to be an ignorant fellow, and took the risk of his not being able to read.

"Look at the signature," pointing a forefinger to the name at the bottom. "You see that? It is Giovanni Petrie."

The letter was one which Petrie had sent to him some months before, and he was endeavoring to make the gate-keeper think it a pass which the priest had given him.

"That name ought to be enough to open the gates. Whatever Petrie says, goes, I reckon. So jab your key in that lock and let me out of here, for I don't want to talk all night."

There was such an air of assurance in his words and manner, that the worthy guardian at the gate was completely deceived.

He made no further objection, but applied the

key to the lock, turned it, and was about to swing the gate open.

He was arrested by a loud call from the door of the Mission building. Within the door stood Father Petrie, waving his hands and shouting some commands. The light was not good, and the form of the priest could not be seen distinctly; but his commands, spoken in Spanish, came plainly enough:

"Stop that man! Do not let him out!"

The gate-keeper, knowing now that something was wrong, was about to relock the gate; but he was prevented by a quick movement on the part of Clarkson.

The crest-hunter sprang on him, and violently forced him backward. Then he swung the gate open and attempted to dash out. The gate-keeper had, however, scrambled to his feet with the quickness of a cat, and now came at him, endeavoring to clasp him about the body.

Father Petrie was hurrying down the path, closely followed by Deel, and the gate-keeper hoped to detain the young man until their arrival.

This was decidedly what Jinks was determined he should not do; and a lively tussle thereupon took place, the result of which was that Jinks succeeded in breaking away, but left in the hands of the gate-keeper one of the tails of his coat.

"That's bad!" he sputtered, as he raced down the street. "That coat-tail will be a dead giveaway. Old Petrie has seen me wear it more than a hundred times. But better to leave the coat-tail in the hands of the keeper than to leave myself. They can't hurt it, and they might hurt me."

"I think I shall have to swear off from trying any more of this sneak-thief business. It's wrong, and like most things that are wrong, always results disastrously."

Clarkson did not stop until he had put fully a square behind him. Jason Deel might take a notion to use a revolver on him, and Jason was reputed to be a good shot.

"This is a case in which distance lends enchantment," he thought, as he looked back at the Mission gate. "With this start, I think I can beat any of them in a race."

There seemed to be no disposition on the part of those at the gate to pursue him, however; and he walked on, half fearing that he might find himself in the morning brought before a police judge on a charge of burglary. But a little thought dispelled this; for he knew that Deel and Petrie would not care to have him tell in a court room of the burning of the Cenci records; which they would doubtless fear he had seen.

He expected the Hummer to return to the city that night; and when sure he was not being followed, he bent his steps toward Hartsook's boarding-house.

The Hummer was in his room, and had not yet retired.

He looked up with an air of questioning surprise as Jinks came in, for there was something in the crest-hunter's face that told that matters had gone wrong.

"Haven't been seeing any ghosts, now, after the style of our good friend, the sport? If you have, you're a lucky dog! It ain't every fellow that can afford to have good-looking women haunting him in that way!"

"It ain't that," said Jinks, striving to smile, as he seated himself in the most convenient chair. "I haven't seen any ghosts, but I've seen something worse: the burning of the records!"

"The Cenci papers?"

Then Jinks proceeded to relieve the curiosity of his friend by relating in detail the events of the night.

"They're scared!" was the sententious comment. "If I'm not much mistaken we'll soon have them on the dead run! Get a man frightened and he gets rattled, and then he is sure to make some fatal blunder. Coolness, my dear boy, is a transcendent jewel that few possess."

"Now that the papers are gone, what are we going to do?" and Clarkson looked inquiringly into the smiling face of the imperturbable Hummer.

"There is another line which we have not been pulling on, and yet there may be some big fish at the end of it. The papers are gone, but we have still the county records. They don't show much, but what they do show may be of benefit. You have seen them? I presume that there were witnesses to the deeds, and a notarial signature?"

Jinks nodded assent.

"We'll have to hunt up those witnesses, and see what they have to say about it. No doubt they are scoundrels who couldn't tell the truth save by accident, but a little persuasive eloquence might work wonders. Sometimes if you grease a fellow's tongue pretty well with a certain yellow substance vulgarly known as gold, it will loosen it surprisingly. My dear Jinks, I have really known it to work miracles in that line."

"And, then, there's the notary. He might be manipulated in the same way. I say might be; for those fellows are supposed to always be above reproach. Yet I knew a case where one signed a marriage record, and called himself therein a justice of the peace."

There seemed to be grounds of hope in the plan thus characteristically outlined; and Clarkson Jinks, as he carefully thought it over, took fresh courage.

CHAPTER XV.

MISS NEVADA'S WITCHERY.

THE city house of Jones Simpson was gayly decorated on a certain evening not long after the events just described. There were flowers in profusion, and there were handsomely-dressed women, and music and merry-making.

The occasion was a ball given in honor of the Hon. Fisher Slocum. It was a very select affair, and very swell, and attended by all the swell people in the city. The great Slocum, himself, was there, as a matter of course; and he was very much pleased by this exceptional mark of attention, and by the incessant flattery bestowed on him.

The Hon. Slocum was a big-mouthed, big-voiced man, with a great predisposition to adipose, and a markedly protuberant stomach. He was frequently designated as the Hon. Sucker, because of the wide expansion of his mouth and the fishy appearance of his eyes.

But the Hon. Fisher was no "sucker" in his own estimation. Just now he was a candidate for the Territorial Legislature, and his friends predicted that he would come under the winning pole many necks ahead of any other in the race. And this might easily be, especially if Slocum's own short neck was taken for a standard of measurement.

The ball had been gotten up by Jones Simpson's blooming daughter, Miss Nevada, at the instigation of the Hummer from Hummingbird.

That astute individual had seen that some questions concerning the Cenci estate, especially those having a legal aspect, were likely to come up for settlement at the coming session of the Legislature, and that a powerful friend in that body would be worth some effort to obtain. After looking the field over, the Hummer from Hummingbird had fixed on Fisher Slocum.

He had said nothing to Slocum on the subject of his thoughts, choosing to use another as his agent. That other was Nevada Simpson.

Miss Nevada was a woman of many resources, and as shrewd and self-reliant as any of her sex.

The delightful days which Cerro Cenci had passed in her company at the ranch-house—for Cerro had forgotten all about his urgent haste to reach Santa Fe on coming under the witching spell of this charming woman—had been productive of the result usual in such cases. Cerro had fallen madly in love with Miss Nevada; and she returned the affection.

Hence, she willingly gave her efforts to draw the politician into the service of Cenci and Hartsook.

Miss Nevada devoted herself assiduously to Slocum. She danced with the Hummer and with Jinks, and even with the gladiator—for the great *espada* was there!—but with none of them so frequently as with the Hon. Fisher.

And this gentleman beamed and smiled and bowed as only a servile politician can. He was supremely happy. If there were any regrets to trouble him, it was because there were not more men there. Women were nice creatures, lovely angels, divine beings! But, alas! they could not vote. And it was votes that the Hon. Sucker wanted more than anything else. If only all of the men in the town could have been there as witnesses of his triumph his cup of joy would have run over.

No one understood better than Slocum the influence wielded by wealth and fashion. And none more slavishly sought the smiles and favors of people of social prominence. In a measure this may have been due to the fact that he had been cradled in poverty.

This bit of early history he was somewhat ashamed of when he moved in the circles of the socially great, albeit it was politically his winning card. He did not forget it though, when canvassing for votes among the ward hummers and in the slums of the town. Then he delighted to call himself a "horny handed son of toil" and "the man of the people."

Miss Nevada had been made fully acquainted with both his strong and weak points, by the Hummer from Hummingbird, and she handled them deftly and to the advantage of her lover.

"You are so clever," she said, looking witchingly up into the face of the politician, when she finally succeeded in drawing him away from the crowd for a bit of conversation.

They were standing in a little alcove which looked out on a well-kept lawn. The window was up, and the soft, cool, night air blew gratefully, after the heat and crush of the crowded ball-room.

"You are so clever, and the people cluster around you so, I wonder your head is not turned by it all."

The face of Hon. Sucker expanded in a pleased grin.

"I am afraid, Miss Simpson, that they don't mean it. To be fawned upon is the penalty one pays for official prominence."

"I should call it a penalty. It seems to me it would be a delight. Judging from what I

have seen to-night, there's no danger but what you will be re-elected."

"I believe I am popular," he declared, with becoming pomposity. "I count on this ball helping me to a considerable extent. I do not wish to flatter, Miss Simpson; but your father has great influence. He is one of the noted men of Santa Fe. An account of the affair will read well, and will benefit me, and I shall see that to-morrow's papers give it some space."

"I'm glad you invited Manuel Garcia, the gladiator. He is fairly worshiped by the Spanish element of the town. He fights shy of politics, though. If I could get him to come out openly and work for me, it would be a big thing—a big thing!"

Slocum rubbed his hands oilily together, as he thought of this charming possibility.

"Garcia is an especial friend of mine," Miss Simpson purred, looking shyly down with averted eyes.

"Ah!" catching at the bait thus thrown out. "Do you—ah—think you could induce him to say a few words in my behalf? Just a few words, from Garcia, Miss Simpson, would be priceless. They might determine the campaign."

"I presume you don't work for fun, Mr. Slocum?" glancing slyly up at him. "It isn't the Western fashion!"

For an instant the great Slocum seemed puzzled.

"You do not," she said. "I know you do not."

"I must confess that when I labor there is usually an end in view."

"I can induce the *espada* to cast his influence in your behalf, and to work for you openly and boldly; but whether I do so or not will depend somewhat on yourself."

"I see you are a veritable little schemer, Miss Simpson," Slocum asserted. "You have something in view. Some favor to ask."

"Provisionally, I have. Whether you are elected to the Legislature or not will depend on several things. You must have the influence and assistance of my father, of the gladiator Garcia, and of the Hummer of Hummingbird. Mr. Hartsook has not been here long, but he already—to use the political phrase—carries a number of votes in his pocket."

Slocum bowed in acknowledgment of the truth of all this.

"And what is the price I am to pay for their assistance?" he asked, fumbling nervously with the heavy seal on his watch-chain.

"The price is not beyond your reach. It is your solemn promise that when you are safe within the Legislative Halls of this Territory you will aid Cerro Cenci to recover his ancestral estates."

"Just what there will be for you to do I do not know. Mr. Cenci's affairs are being managed by Mr. Hartsook. Whatever he tells you to do will be the thing for you to do. He will have absolute authority in the matter."

"I presume it is nothing that would injure me? I could not afford to commit political *harrakari*!"

"Nothing of the kind. If I am not mistaken, there will be a bill presented for passage which you will be expected to work for!"

The politician stared reflectively out of the window as he slowly revolved in his mind the thoughts presented by Miss Nevada.

"And there is another man whose influence would be as great as that of any I have named. It is Stuttering Sam, the sport. I am positive I can also turn his influence to you."

"If you will do these things, Miss Simpson, I promise to act as you wish. Provided"—and he faced her squarely, "it is not something that will injure my political future."

"I have the advantage of you in one way," and he laughed hoarsely. "The service you are to render is to be performed before I am myself called on to do anything. If you fail me I shall be released from all obligations."

"Very true!" she said. "Therein lies our safety. You could have no better guarantee that I will perform what I promise. I will see that you are elected. You will need money and my father shall furnish it. The *espada*, and the others I have named, will deliver the votes."

"You are a regular politician," he remarked, charmed by this roseate prophecy.

"Only a woman!" and she smilingly fluttered her fan.

Then she led the great man back into the whirl and the excitement of the ball-room, and danced and chatted with him until the stars paled their fires.

CHAPTER XVI.

SPIRITED AWAY.

THE Hummer from Hummingbird, accompanied by Jones Simpson, Stuttering Sam, and the bull-fighter, visited the Hon. Fisher Slocum in his office the next day.

On this occasion it was made clear to the politician what he was expected to do if elected through the influence of those present.

"You can't get there without the help of these, my friends!" the Hummer declared. "I think you understand that quite as well as I do. If they should oppose your election your chances

would be extremely attenuated. In fact, you would be overwhelmingly defeated.

"We will see that you are supplied with money to carry on the canvas in a proper and becoming manner. When elected, you are to be free save in one particular: You are to become the champion of Cerro Cenci against all foes."

"Will you do it, and sit on a carpeted seat in legislative halls? or do you prefer defeat and absolute independence?"

Slocum knew that these were no idle words, nor the vaporings of a political charlatan.

The influence of Miss Nevada's witchery was still strong upon him; and this influence, backed by the power of the men present, decided him.

"I am your most humble servant! Give me your aid, and I will serve you."

It was the promise they wanted; and Simpson thereupon drew a check for a goodly sum payable to the politician; after which the great man was left to his own reflections.

Having settled this point, and made sure of Slocum's assistance, Hartsook and Jinks began their search for the notary and witnesses whose names were attached to the copies of the Cenci deeds in the records of the county.

The dates of the making of these deeds differed materially from the dates of their record. The deeds were dated many years back, while the records bore comparatively recent dates. To the mind of the Hummer this was of itself a suspicious circumstance.

The names of the witnesses to the deeds were Spanish, and the search for these witnesses among the Spanish population of the town was not of an easy character. The Hummer and Clarkson would probably have failed utterly if they had not called the gladiator to their aid.

Garcia's acquaintance with the Mexican element was very extensive, and within two days he sent Hartsook word that he had located one of the witnesses, but that the other, together with the notary, could not be found.

The witness who had been unearthed by Garcia, was a dried-up specimen of Mexican humanity, very old and very feeble, and with a memory not of the best.

The Hummer called on him in company with the gladiator, taking with him a copy of one of the deeds.

The questions put by Hartsook, as well as the answers of the old man, were translated by Garcia.

"You witnessed the making of this deed?" the Hummer asked, after the *espada* had carefully read and explained the contents of the writing.

The blurred eyes of the old man twinkled slyly.

The Hummer slipped a coin into the curved fingers.

"You witnessed this deed?" he asked again.

"Ay!" and the old man bobbed his head.

"And it was made by Pedro Cenci?"

This question the Mexican did not answer so readily.

"Speak!" Garcia urged. "This was many years ago, and no harm can befall you for what was done in that old time."

The Mexican held an almost reverential feeling for the great *espada*, and it was revealed now that Hartsook had executed a master stroke in bringing Garcia with him.

"It is not so long ago!" the old man chuckled.

"But the date is old, and Pedro Cenci has been dead many years."

"Ay, ay! It is so."

"Then the paper was not signed by Cenci at all?"

The old man chuckled again, and showed his yellow teeth.

"If Cenci did not sign this, who did sign it?" Hartsook queried.

"*Quien sabe?*"

"You know, for you saw the signing."

The old man shook his head, and it was not until the Hummer had slipped another gold-piece into the claw-like fingers that he would deign to make further reply.

"It was not signed by Cenci," he confessed, when pressed by Garcia for an answer. "It was signed by the notary."

"Then it is a false deed—a forgery, and Jason Deel has no right to the lands which he holds under it."

Hartsook had gained a point beyond even his sanguine anticipations. The testimony of this witness would blot out Deel's alleged title to the Cenci estate and restore it to its rightful owner. This testimony must be had at all hazards. He regretted now that he had not brought with him a notary or some one empowered to administer oaths. Then the old Mexican's account could have been put into the form of an affidavit.

He resolved that he would retrieve this error and come the next day with Garcia and a notary. Had the hour not been so late he would have gone about the matter then.

It would have been wisdom on his part to do so: for when he returned the next day, with the *espada* and the man of law, he found the old Mexican gone.

He had disappeared mysteriously in the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LIGHTNING-STROKE.

THAT this was the work of Jason Deel, no one acquainted with the circumstances could doubt. Hartsook had departed from the house occupied by the little old Mexican feeling that all his movements had been sufficiently circumspect. On the occasion of the visit, he had not worn his cuckoo-winged hat, neither had Garcia been attired in his customary flaming costume.

Notwithstanding all this, it was now very evident that they had been watched and followed, perhaps even their talk with the Mexican overheard.

It was a serious blow, given just when they seemed on the eve of an important advancement.

As soon as he learned that the old man had disappeared, the Hummer made inquiries in the neighborhood of all who might by any possibility know of his whereabouts. But the effort was useless. The old man had lived alone the greater portion of the time, and none of those of whom inquiry was made had seen him leave the place.

Hartsook was so greatly wrought up by the circumstances of the disappearance that he at once instituted a thorough search of the town. Garcia with friends was sent through the Mexican portion; while Clarkson Jinks led the search elsewhere. Nothing came of it all, however. The wizened Mexican had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed him.

On the morning of the day following, while Hartsook and Stuttering Sam were prosecuting their inquiries in an obscure quarter of the city, they were placed under arrest.

The official who served the warrant was a Mexican.

They could not understand more than half he said, for he spoke the vilest possible English; but there was no mistaking the purport of the warrants. The strangest thing about this rather strange affair, however, was the character of the charges.

"I don't exactly catch on," declared the Hummer, staring at the bit of paper. "This isn't as clear as some things that might be mentioned. I always thought that my head sat rather level; but here I am charged with lunacy."

The charge preferred against the sport was the same.

"There c-can't be any fake business about this, I r-r-reckon!" "Sh-shall we go with the s-soundrel?"

The sport looked curiously at the official; and as he did so became aware that the latter had quite a following, and that this following was closing in on himself and his friend.

"We'll have to, or make a fight of it," said the Hummer, who had observed the same thing. "There can't be anything in this! The charges are absurd on the face of them. Perhaps it's a joke, as you suggested; a trick that some of our over-smart friends are playing on us."

The Mexican smiled amiably when he saw they intended no resistance. He had anticipated a fight; hence had brought a posse.

"Keep b-back your men!" Stuttering Sam harshly commanded, dropping a hand to the pocket which contained his revolver. "If you d-don't there'll be a m-m-muss, and a lively one, too! We'll go along with you, if you don't crowd us."

"Si, senor!"

The official placed his hand on his heart and bowed with all the politeness of a Spanish dancing-master.

He waved a hand to the men who were pressing too closely; and as these fell back, he stepped to the side of the arrested men and walked with them up the street.

A number of people had come out of their adobe houses and were staring intently at the procession. Others, and these mostly women, peered timidly from the odd little windows, not daring to venture outside.

"This is a go!" asseverated the Hummer, giving his blonde mane a shake, as he looked up into the handsome face of the sport. "I've been pulled on a good many charges, but nothing quite like this. My fellow-prisoner, is there anything loony in my appearance? My head is where it ought to be, isn't it? This is more like an iridescent dream than a sober, somber reality. What slap will fortune give us next?"

"It may not be so b-blamed funny by the time we get through with it!" and Stuttering Sam vainly essayed to return the cheery smile. "On the f-face of it, it looks to be a j-j-joke, but it may turn out to be someth-thing else before we get to the end of the r-rope."

Being in the Spanish quarter, the street was little more than an alley crowded between blank white walls; and as they passed up the narrow, winding thoroughfare, a crowd of curious men and boys followed in their wake.

They did not know to what point they were being taken, for this part of the city was to them unfamiliar ground; but they arrived presently at an adobe building, built in the form of a square, with an interior paved court within which flowers bloomed and a fountain sung musically.

They were conducted into a room of this

building which overlooked the fragrant flowers and the sparkling fountain. Here was seated an inferior judge or justice, flanked by a pile of law-books and legal-looking documents.

He frowned with severe magisterial dignity as they came in. He was of mixed Mexican and American blood, and spoke English with considerable accuracy.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, surveying the Hummer critically and making a keen note of the cuckoo-winged hat. "It is a clear case! Very little evidence will be required."

All this was spoken in an undertone, and as if he were inadvertently expressing his thoughts aloud. Then he scribbled rapidly on a big pad which he had spread before him.

"Your name?" he questioned, fixing his beady eyes on the sport.

"S-Samuel H-Hollingsworth!" was the prompt reply. "I'm pretty w-well known in S-Santa Fe. It would be a f-favor if you'd l-l-let me know what I've been brought here for."

"All in good time, my dear fellow," with a pitying glance, as he drank in the stammering sentences.

Then he turned again to his pad, and muttered in that humming undertone, as he scribbled some further notes:

"Very little evidence needed! Cases very clear! Very clear!"

The muttered comment aroused the sport's ire.

"Just sp-spit out the charges against us, will you! and don't sit there buzzing to yourself like a b-bumblebee!"

"Dear m-m!" and the official drew back in real or feigned alarm. "You didn't tell me, Pablo, that these men were violent. Throw a guard around them!"

This was almost more than Stuttering Sam could bear. It seemed adding insult to injury.

Those of the posse who had followed their superior into the court-room crowded closer about the prisoners, their hands on their weapons as if anticipating an attempt to escape. Matters were beginning to have an ugly, ominous look; and the accused began to wonder if they had not done an unwise thing in quietly accompanying the officer to this place. To get away now would be difficult if not impossible.

"Read those ch-charges!" the sport commanded, fiercely knitting his brows. "This is g-getting to be all-fired t-tiresome. If I'm a l-lunatic, I w-w-want to know it."

The justice bent on him another searching look, then fished some papers from a pile in front of him.

"Salvino Cordova, a man of repute, has filed accusations against you, because of certain riotous acts committed by you."

"Is the charge of lunacy coupled with them?" the Hummer asked.

The officer nodded an affirmative.

"I presume, then, that we will be entitled to counsel, and to an examination by experts."

The justice looked at them in a manner which said almost as plainly as words:

"Hear these poor fellows! They are as mad as March hares!"

Then he said aloud:

"You will be given fair treatment. I am an honorable man; and whoever comes before me shall have mercy dealt out to him."

The accused were conducted to seats; and a witness was called.

He gave his name as Ilfonso Salvator; and professed to have witnessed, on the previous night, many things tending to show the insanity of the men now before the justice. He spoke English so badly that an interpreter was made necessary. Not that the Mexican official could not understand him, but that the court records were in English and the accused were entitled to know what was said against them.

"As I was on my way home, last night, I saw these men," pointing a finger at the accused. "They were in the Spanish quarter; and were running in and out of the adobes, asking foolish questions, and frightening the women out of their wits. And the one with the wings on his hat kept putting it off and on at every man he met, and asking if he knew what had become of an old, white-headed Mexican. Now, there are many old, white-headed Mexicans; and why should these men be frightening the women-folk and the children in that way? It is strange!"

"Very strange," muttered the justice, scribbling furiously on his pad.

Hartsook and Stuttering Sam could readily see that in this court, where prejudice held sway and which was predisposed against them, such evidence might be very damaging. It contained an essential grain of truth, which made it more difficult to combat than if it had been wholly false.

Other witnesses were called, whose testimony was of the same general character, being distorted and garbled accounts of very recent acts of the Hummer and the sport, all told in a way to create the impression that the men were really insane.

Both Hartsook and Stuttering Sam put numerous questions to the witnesses; but these questions, and the replies given to them, only tended to increase the general belief in their insanity. The stammering of the sport—and he

stammered more than ever under the influence of the excitement—and the cuckoo wings on the hat of the Hummer, told strongly against them. At each question there were mirthful grins in the crowd, as well as pitying glances. The major portion of the spectators believed the prisoners insane. As for the justice and the witnesses, it was difficult to tell what their opinions on the subject were.

Before the close of the examination, Hartsook arose, and in an even and mild-tempered speech, asked that they might be given the benefit of the opinion of experts. The justice, however, gave no more heed to the request than if it had remained unuttered.

Then Stuttering Sam, in language that was somewhat fierce and threatening, demanded that certain of their friends be sent for; and when this was refused, he denounced the court and the officials in unmeasured terms.

"Y-you're a grand s-s-soundrel, sir!" he asserted in conclusion. "A d-d-disgrace to the official ermine! You ought to be d-dragged out of the ch-chair that you so dishonor. If you r-render the deci-cision which I know you c-contempla-plate, I will s-see that you are properly p-punished for it, if it takes me the rest of my lifetime!"

He sat down, white with anger, and glared so furiously at the official, that the latter shrunk back in genuine terror.

"Take them away!" he commanded, turning to the constable. "Take them away before they injure some one. I will make out papers of commitment."

He had obviously intended to deliver a lecture filled with wise sayings and moral reflections, but Stuttering Sam's outburst induced him to forego this pleasure and hasten the commitment of the accused.

The constable, who had also been showing signs of nervousness, obeyed with much alacrity, a motion of his hands causing his men to close in compact order about the prisoners.

Thus closely guarded, Hartsook and the sport were led from the room, the excited crowd streaming after them.

To their surprise they found a close carriage in waiting. There was a Mexican driver on the front seat. Into this carriage the accused were forced, the constable and three of his armed aids crowding in beside them.

They were no sooner seated than the horses were given a vigorous cut, and the carriage rolled away at a high rate of speed.

"My devoted partner in distress," and the Hummer from Hummingbird lent a comical look on his associate, "this is getting to be a very serious matter. We don't know what station our tickets may call for. I presume we are booked for the through trip and that there will be no stops at way stations. All because I wear feathers on my hat, and you've got a stitch in that honest tongue of yours."

"It ai-ain't that!" growled the sport. "You've w-wore those cuckoo wings for a g-good while, and I've been S-Stuttering Sam for more years than I c-care to remember; and we've never been taken for m-maniacs until now. I tell you this s-string isn't as straight as it m-might be."

"I suppose you know the name of the gentleman who has put these ornamental kinks into it?" the Hummer questioned, lowering his voice and looking at the guards. "If I'm not utterly at sea, without rudder or compass, his name is Jason Deel."

Stuttering Sam nodded an assent, then lapsed into silence as the vehicle rolled monotonously onward.

"Where are they taking us to? Is there a lunatic asylum near here?"

The sport did not know; the officer and guards were non-committal; but the question was answered in a most positive way, within an hour.

The carriage was driven within a walled inclosure, in the center of which was a squatty building of uninteresting exterior.

Here the prisoners were assisted to alight; and ten minutes later found themselves behind the somber walls, and shut within cells from which it seemed they could never hope to escape.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CERRO CENCI TO THE FRONT.

THE witchery of Miss Nevada Simpson had exerted as marked an influence over Cerro Cenci as it had over Fisher Slocum, the politician, though, of course, in an entirely different way. From the moment Cerro had seen her charging through the stifling smoke into the fiery hell that seemed about to engulf him, he had been her ardent and devoted slave. How he had remained at the Simpson Ranch day after day, although he had professed to be in so great a hurry to reach Santa Fe, has been noted.

Nearly two weeks had been passed at the ranch-house, and in long drives and walks in its vicinity, in a way that to the young people was supremely delightful. In that time, words had been spoken and ties formed, which, for weal or woe, must inevitably tinge the whole of their after lives.

Miss Nevada had taken a lively interest in Cenci's efforts to regain his birthright; and had continuously exerted her influence—which was not small—in his behalf. She had enlisted the

sympathies of her father; and the power of Jones Simpson was a thing not to be lightly regarded.

Cerro had taken part in the search for the missing witness; and being unable to discover anything himself, waited patiently for reports from the Hummer and Stuttering Sam. He had already seen Clarkson Jinks and others, only to find that they had been as unsuccessful as himself.

Hartsook and the sport did not return; and after two days of uneasy suspense, he was driven to the conclusion that they had been in some manner foully dealt with, and therefore proceeded to set on foot an investigation.

Very naturally his first thought was of Jason Deel, and of the bridge foreman, Tom Taulbee.

Taulbee and his men were at work, as usual, upon the railway, and a close watch on their movements brought no revelations. Further surveillance appeared to be a waste of time; and, puzzled as to the course to take, Cerro went boldly to Deel.

Deel was seated quietly in his office; and civilly invited Cenci to a chair, though the look on his dark face was more than usually repellent.

"I came to make some inquiries," and Cenci had a more martial and distinguished air than ever, as he settled himself haughtily in his seat and looked fixedly at Deel.

"Two of my friends are missing, and I thought it possible you might know something concerning their whereabouts."

There was an accusation in the tones which did not pass unnoticed by Deel.

"I haven't been carrying them around in my pocket!" he declared, curtly, pulling nervously at his shaggy beard.

"No; of course not! But still you may know where they are."

"Well, I don't, then!" and he turned to the papers which he had been examining.

"See here," and Cenci's dark eyes lighted with sudden fire, "I can't be put off that way. Hartsook and Hollingsworth are gone. They have disappeared, and not a trace of them can be found anywhere!"

"Perhaps they've taken leg-bail, and left the country for the country's good. Such a thing shouldn't surprise any one."

"If they should do such a thing, you would be surprised as much as anybody. You know they haven't done anything of the kind. And what's more, Deel, I believe you know just where they are!"

He looked Deel squarely in the eyes, as he made this charge.

If he had hoped, however, to surprise Deel into any admission, he was disappointed; for although the latter ruffled somewhat in anger, he did not betray any symptoms of guilt.

"That's a rather grave charge," he retorted. "You ought to be a little sure of your ground before making it. A few breaks like that, and you might get yourself into trouble. In my time, I've known men to be sued for slander for less than that. I presume, though, that you've judgment enough not to repeat that outside of this office."

"You're over-reaching yourself just a little bit, aren't you?" and Cenci's tones were smooth as silk. "You flame up just as if I had charged you with some crime. All I stated was, that I believe you know where those men are. If you don't know, and had no hand in causing their disappearance, it seems to me that a simple denial would have been better than the threats you've made. There is good authority for the statement that the wicked flee, etc. You needn't finish the quotation, even mentally, if it isn't applicable."

Jason Deel's dark eyes burned with wrath. In coolness and calmness he was no match for this young Spaniard.

"Why do you come bothering me about your friends and making insinuations? I don't know where they are. And if I did, I don't know that I would tell you, when you come at me in that style. I shouldn't think you'd come to me at any rate, considering our strained relations."

"Oh, that land business!" and Cenci, who had not thought of referring to the matter, lifted his brows. "That will be settled all right, in due time."

"Don't you think you'd better drop that?" Deel questioned. "You might as well put your money into the river. This Hummer from Hummingbird and his friends are making a fool of you. You ought to see that my title can't be broken. Any lawyer of common sense will tell you that."

Cenci wondered at the man's audacity, when he recalled what had so recently happened. Was it possible that Deel had had no hand in spiriting away the old Mexican witness, and in the equally mysterious disappearance of Hartsook and Hollingsworth?

"I think I have a legal claim," the young man asserted, "but there's no need of discussing it now. We'll try to get at the truth of the matter in the courts."

"If you only would, instead of attacking me in the underhanded way you have been doing. I'm not afraid to trust the courts."

It was on the point of Cenci's tongue to tell him of the destruction of the papers in the San

Muerto Mission; but he wisely held his peace, and finding he could surprise Deel into no avowal, nor obtain any information from him, he soon after left the place.

CHAPTER XIX. A LIVELY TUSSELE.

AS Cenci left the office, there was in his mind a lurking doubt of the wisdom of all he had said. Deel was his bitter enemy. Had he been wise in letting him know he was engaged in a search for the missing men? Deel would probably have surmised as much, but the surmise would now become a certainty.

Not knowing what course to pursue, he made a visit to the office of Clarkson Jinks, the crest-hunter.

That young gentleman was seated in his easiest chair, with his feet on the table in his customary attitude of repose, while his light-hued eyes were sleepily watching the rings of smoke that curled upward from his cigar.

"Have a chair," he said, tossing the stump of the cigar out of the window, and bringing his feet earthward. "My dear fellow, how are you?"

"Not feeling as bright as a dollar," and Cerro, having seated himself, proceeded to detail what had befallen him.

"And you can't find any traces of them?" Jinks queried, pulling with his thin fingers at his sandy mustache. "Well, they couldn't have flown away; and the earth doesn't open its mouth to receive people nowadays, unless a sexton pries it open with a spade."

"Do you think the last could have happened to them?" Cenci anxiously asked.

"Hardly; though it may. They've been pressing Deel too hard, I think. All I can suggest is that further search be made for them; and with your permission, I will look up the gladiator, and see what we can do in that line."

It was what Cenci would have suggested; and when he left the office, Jinks departed also in search of Garcia.

Cerro never dreamed of looking for his friends in an insane asylum. Thinking it all over, however, he did reach the conclusion that they might be held in the Mission of San Muerto. When all is considered, this theory had strong grounds for support. Father Petrie was Deel's closest ally; and the acts of the priest had already shown that he was not above any baseness. The men would have to be held there without the knowledge of Manzanini and the other inmates. It was barely possible that Petrie might be able to accomplish this.

Save to Father Petrie and one or two others of the priests, Cerro Cenci was unknown in the Mission. He had never been there, but had heard the place so well described by Hartsook and Jinks, that he fancied he could make his way anywhere within its four walls.

He spoke Spanish as fluently as any man in Santa Fe, that being his native tongue, and he believed it possible for him to make his way within the Mission without great danger of discovery.

His face was perfectly smooth; and he proceeded to experiment a little in the way of disguises.

He first procured a suit of clothing such as is worn by the priests; and taking it to his room, put it on and surveyed himself in the glass.

He was delighted, for the disguise was as perfect as one could wish. He saw before him the representation of a young priest; such a perfect counterfeit, in fact, that he felt if he could escape the keen glances of Petrie, he would be entirely safe within the Mission walls.

It was yet early in the afternoon; and anxious to test the sufficiency of the disguise, he hurried from his apartment and toward the San Muerto.

When he arrived before the big gate, he found the gate-keeper on guard, as usual. That sleepy individual scarcely gave him a second look, for it was nothing uncommon to see visiting padres.

Cenci had expected to be questioned, and had concocted a story for ready use; and to carry out the statements he thought to make, he had, with pigments, given a deeply-bronzed tinge to his cheeks.

He directed his footsteps first to the hospital wards, and was there kindly received by the Sister Superior. The story he had manufactured, he told glibly enough, and it was accepted without question. It was to the effect that he was a traveling padre from Old Mexico, who had come north to visit the various Catholic stations, and refresh his mind with what he might see and hear.

Within the wards, assiduously attending to the wants of the sick and disabled, was Juanita Concha.

He managed to talk with her for a few moments; and in that short talk saw deep down into the secret recesses of her heart. She was truly a girl without guile, pure-minded and true-hearted, and her thoughts lay revealed to him like an open book.

There was a paleness of the cheek, a hollowness of the eye, and a languor of the footsteps that told of the "worm in the bud" that was too surely feeding on her young life.

"She loves Stuttering Sam," he told himself, as he turned away. "She loves him, but she will not confess it even to herself. She has resolved to immure herself here and crush out this passion, and in crushing it she will crush herself."

His heart bled for her, as he thought of his own love for Nevada Simpson. It was a terrible thing to thus strangle every hope that makes life worth living. But it showed of what stern stuff she was made, and how true she was to her convictions.

He did not tarry long in the hospital, being desirous of making the circuit of the various buildings that he might determine if his friends were held within.

Manzanini was in the record-room, but as he had never met that priest he had nothing to fear from him.

From there he went to the work-shops and the schools, everywhere keeping his eyes and ears open for anything that might betray the whereabouts of Hartsook and Hollingsworth. But he saw nothing; heard nothing.

Once, on turning a landing of a stairway, he narrowly missed an encounter with Father Petrie, but he avoided it by hurrying into a side corridor and walking rapidly in another direction.

For more than two hours he walked to and fro in the Mission of San Muerto, keenly alert, but nothing rewarded this expenditure of time and vigilance.

Finally he descended to the ground floor, sick at heart with his failure to accomplish anything, and was about to make his departure, when he heard the loud voice of Jason Deel.

The sound gave him a most uncomfortable start.

Deel was conversing with Father Petrie, and they were coming in his direction. He tried to evade them by turning back and seeking another exit. All he succeeded in doing, however, was to gain a few steps on them, and pass out of the room just as they were entering it.

It was too late to escape the keen eyes of Jason Deel.

The latter recognized him in spite of his change of attire, and the false tan on his cheeks.

"You villain!" he shouted, clutching at Father Petrie for support, while his face became ashen in its pallor. "What are you doing here?"

It was useless to try to escape. So Cenci turned boldly about and advanced toward the two.

"I presume you didn't know I had taken orders," he said, assuming a coolness he by no means felt.

"You are a scoundrel!" Deel exclaimed, white with wrath. "A masquerading villain!"

"Thank you for the compliment!" and Cenci bowed with the politeness of a Chesterfield. "No doubt you are a gentleman of the first water!"

Father Petrie was no less startled than Deel, but he managed to hide his feelings better. Nevertheless, his hands shook, and his jelly-like face trembled, as Cenci came so boldly toward him.

"You are Cerro Cenci," he cried.

"Truly a valuable bit of information! If you would only tell me something now that would be of some use; where you are keeping the Hummer and Stuttering Sam, for instance!"

The shot struck home; and the jelly-like face became more tremulous than ever.

Deel, on the contrary, greeted the remark with scorn. He knew they were not there, and so felt safe enough. It even lifted a load from his mind.

"He thinks we have been carrying them around in our pockets, Father Petrie!" was the airy comment. "Will you be so good as to disabuse his mind of such a slanderous idea? Throw the Mission doors open and let him look over the place to his heart's content."

Father Petrie did not, however, view the matter so composedly. It angered him to see Cenci thus masquerading; for though a base enough fellow himself, he still had some respect for the garb he had disgraced.

"I shall not throw the doors open, neither shall he go out of here!" he declared, stepping backward as if he feared the threats would draw down on his head personal violence. "He is guilty of a crime which ought to be punished. Stop him there, Deel, will you?"

Cenci had turned and was retreating from the room and into the open air; but though the priest was anxious that the young man should be halted and punished for his temerity, he did not care to undertake the task himself.

Neither was Deel desirous of making the attempt, for there was an ugly look on the young man's face as he retreated; a look which showed as plainly as words that he did not mean to be taken without a fight.

Seeing that Deel hesitated, Father Petrie shouted loudly for assistance, and a number of persons, both men and women, came running in that direction.

"Stop him! Stop him!" the fat priest commanded, trotting after the retreating man and making vigorous gestures in his direction. "He is a false priest; stop him!"

Encouraged by the crowd that seemed hurrying to their aid, Jason Deel rushed upon Cenci and attempted to clasp him about the waist and hold him until assistance could arrive. In this he did not use his customary prudence.

No sooner did Cenci feel the encircling arms than he wheeled with the quickness of thought, and with a heavy blow dealt straight from the shoulder knocked Jason Deel flat on the hard ground.

This cooled the rising ardor of the priest; who, not daring to approach nearer after witnessing this rough handling of his friend, contented himself with leaping up and down on his fat legs and screaming at the top of his voice.

Any one hearing his cries, and not understanding the cause, would surely have thought he was being murdered.

Among those hurrying to the aid of the priest and Deel were some who were gifted with courage; and they came at the young man in a way to show that they meant fight.

Cenci realized that it would be ruinous to permit them to come to close quarters, and so he dropped his belligerence and fled swiftly toward the gate.

Fortunately the cries of Father Petrie had also drawn the gate-keeper from his position; and as the gate stood half ajar, there was nothing to impede Cenci's flight.

In a moment he had dashed through the gate, and was speeding toward the town.

CHAPTER XX.

A DARING MOVEMENT.

In the meanwhile, Clarkson Jinks, whose business of searching records always turned his mind in that direction, had been closely scanning the papers for suspicious-looking advertisements, and also making a round of the courts. There was nothing in the advertising columns to warrant any work in that direction, but his search of the court records brought big returns.

He was fairly well known to the majority of the officials of the place, for he had been engaged in work of that kind for a long time, and when he came to the adobe with the little courtroom overlooking the fountain and flowers, the justice glanced at him askance, and with a feeling of suspicion.

"What is it you are looking for to-day?" he inquired.

"Just a look at the records," with an air of easy familiarity.

"I've about concluded not to allow them to be fumbled over any more," said the justice, endeavoring to appear composed. "So many of these newspaper fellows come here, look at my books, and then write up sensational accounts of the trials. It drives business from me."

Jinks knew very well that the man had no right to keep his records from the public; and that, in fact, the fellow would never have pretended to do a thing of the kind if he had had no dread of what might be that day discovered. But he waived the point and said, with assumed carelessness:

"I will not trouble you long. Some years ago, a Spanish gentleman died, leaving a child, and I have understood that a suit in the interest of that child was begun here some time ago. There may be a mistake about it, but I have been commissioned to examine into the matter and ascertain what may be found."

As it chanced, there had been several suits of that character commenced recently, and thus the official was thrown off his guard.

Then, too, after he had given himself time to think, he became convinced that there was nothing in the records on which the crest-hunter could fasten. The charges against the Hummer and Stuttering Sam, as well as all the entries pertaining thereto, were entered under false names; so that, as far as the records were concerned, there was nothing to show that parties named Hartsook and Hollingsworth had ever been before this court.

Clarkson Jinks, however, had anticipated that this would be the case, and was not greatly baffled thereby.

The justice, in order to prevent him from lighting on the suspicious entries, officiously undertook to assist him in his search, pointing out the pages where the entries of suits by guardians of children had been set down; but Jinks had the vision of an eagle in matters of this kind, and was not greatly disturbed by the actions of the justice.

The man's very suspiciousness convinced him that he was on the right trail; and he knew that if his friends had been brought before this court at all, it had been done recently, and that he would not have to go far back in the records to find what he wanted.

As the justice was telling him where to look for certain entries, he dextrously flipped the leaves that had been last written on, and there saw, as he believed, what he was searching for.

Two men, with unmistakably Mexican names, had been brought before the court charged with insanity; and their insanity having been attested, they had been sent to an asylum named therein. Even in the hasty glance which Jinks was able to take, he saw that the legal formalities necessary in such cases had been wantonly

overlooked, going to prove that the examination must have been a mere farce. There was nothing to show that the testimony of medical experts had been sought, or that the men had been given the benefit of legal counsel.

Int-resting as this page was to him, he did not tarry over it, but passed to that which the justice was so eagerly pointing out. Over the latter he hovered as if he had there found what he was seeking; and when he left the place, so completely had he played his part, that the justice was wholly blinded to the truth.

The crest-hunter could have shouted for very joy when he gained the freedom of the street, but he wisely refrained from doing so. He knew where the asylum mentioned was located; and, as he proceeded to his office, began to form plans for the release of his friends.

He was sure that the alleged Mexicans were none other than Stuttering Sam and the Hummer from Hummingbird; but there was a possibility that he might be mistaken, and so he concluded not to begin any legal proceedings until fully assured of the truth of his surmise.

There was but one way to ascertain the facts, and that was to go directly to the place and learn by personal inspection.

How to do this was what at first puzzled him; for it was reasonably safe to assume that if there had been foul play in the justice's office, this foul play had extended to the asylum itself. Hence should he go there openly and boldly, every precaution would be taken to keep him from arriving at the facts.

Nevertheless, feeling that nothing was to be gained by delay, he proceeded as speedily as possible to the vicinity of the place where he believed his friends to be held.

There was something of a scattered settlement here, with some shops and drinking establishments, together with a few small manufactories; and by reason of this, he was able to approach without attracting especial attention.

The institution was, in a measure, a private one, though patients were frequently placed there by the authorities for treatment at the public expense.

He drew as near to the asylum itself as he dared; and from the shadow of a tree in the small public square narrowly watched the place.

The high wall shut out the view to a great extent, but this was a hindrance which he saw no way to overcome. For more than an hour he sat there, calmly smoking, and seeming to take no note of anything, but all the while furtively watching the building and grounds.

Nothing occurred to repay him for his trouble. The place had a quiet and restful look, whatever might be happening within the interior. There were but few people passing to and fro, and those were, as he supposed, servants and laborers.

It was past the middle of the afternoon when he took his seat under the tree in the public square, and night was almost at hand before he saw any opportunity for action.

Then a man came out of the big gate with an ash-cart drawn by a mule. He was a lazy, sleepy fellow, of the low, peon type, and went about his work in the careless, indifferent way characteristic of his class. There were four barrels in the ash-cart; and when he had emptied these of their contents and placed them again in the cart, he sauntered leisurely over to one of the drinking establishments to take a glass of something exhilarating with a group of cronies.

Clarkson Jinks made a quick inventory of the chances of reaching the ash-cart without being seen, and concluded they were fair. The mule was a stolid sort of beast, which would never move out of his tracks without being lashed, and the driver paid no attention to him whatever after having left him.

Every one within sight appeared to be paying strict attention to their own affairs when Clarkson made the venture.

He stole softly out from beneath the tree, and taking advantage of a few intervening shrubs and cacti, quietly approached the cart. When he reached it, he looked carefully about to be certain that he was unobserved, and then climbed into one of the hindmost barrels, where he thought he would not be in so much danger of discovery by the peon driver.

The latter loitered a full quarter-of-an-hour, and then shuffled back to his cart, never dreaming of what had taken place in the interval of his absence. Men might try to get out of the asylum, and sometimes did, but he had never heard of one endeavoring to get in.

Hence, he barely gave a look at the barrels as he climbed to his seat and applied his heavy whip to the mule.

The driver was lazy enough himself, but he did not tolerate laziness in this much-abused animal, and under the goadings of the keen lash, it broke into a brisk amble which speedily carried the cart within the asylum grounds.

The stable having been reached, and the peon feeling that he had done a fair day's work, the mule was unhitched from the cart and led away, leaving Jinks crouching undiscovered inside the barrel.

If the driver had been a really keen-eyed and vigilant fellow, it is very probable that the

crest-hunter would have experienced much difficulty in thus entering the grounds, for the three barrels which were empty were jolted about in a somewhat lively manner by the motion of the cart, while the one in which Jinks sat retained its steadiness. But the driver was not keen-eyed and vigilant; and the feat was therefore accomplished to the crest-hunter's entire satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXI.

A BATTLE WITH A MANIAC.

It was a cramped and awkward position in which to crouch, a position provocative of many aches and twinges of pain, yet Clarkson Jinks remained closely hidden in the barrel until night drew its friendly mantle over the scene. Then he emerged from his place of hiding and proceeded to stretch his cramped limbs.

The lamps in the building had been lighted, and he knew he could do nothing until the arrival of a later hour.

"I'm not in a very presentable condition for going anywhere," he declared, as he endeavored to brush the ashes from his clothing and out of his hair. "I'm covered with that stuff inside and out. Egad! My best friend wouldn't know me."

Then he looked up at the building.

"How I'm ever to get there, I don't know; but I've got this far, and maybe I can get further. 'Twould be a joke, now, if I should be caught and locked up for a sure-enough lunatic. I was a fool for not telling some one where I meant to go!"

He half wished he had brought Garcia with him, for the gladiator had not a match in Santa Fe in a fight; but he remembered that if he had done so, the chances of getting into the grounds would have been materially lessened.

Having brushed away the ashes as well as he could, he seated himself under the cart, and gave his entire attention to the building. He could make out nothing of a satisfactory character, however, and a little later advanced to a point nearer.

There was considerable life and animation within the big house, and servants were coming and going, showing that the evening's work was not yet finished.

Jinks kept close to the walls and made the circuit of them. In the rear he found a door, which opened into the kitchen and thence into a wide hall.

There was a lamp in the kitchen, but the place was not occupied, and he took advantage of this temporary absence of the cook or other presiding deity to dart through the kitchen and into the hall.

He had no idea what he should do when he had once gained the hall, but resolved to take the risk of discovery rather than be barred outside when the doors should be closed.

He found the hall deserted, as the kitchen had been. There was no place where he might conceal himself; but a stairway led to the floor above, and up this he tip-toed.

When he had gained the upper floor, he found there a corridor, at one end of which was a room or closet of considerable size used for the storage of coal.

He tried the door of this closet: and finding it unlocked, softly drew it open and crept into the black hole which was thus revealed.

After crouching there awhile, and hearing footsteps and voices in the various rooms and passages he concluded he could do no better than remain where he was until the lateness of the hour had sent these busy people to bed. A large lump of coal served him very comfortably for a seat, and he endeavored to possess his soul in patience while the slowly moving minutes passed.

All became quiet at last, with the exception of certain sounds coming from another wing of the building, and which he attributed to the preternatural wakefulness of certain of the insane inmates.

He crept out of the coal-room and made his way stealthily along the corridor, straining his ears for any guiding noises. After he had passed through one or two corridors and up a number of stairways, a sudden and unearthly din told him he had reached the vicinity of the cells where the hopeless maniacs were kept.

As he made this discovery—an uncomfortable one in itself—he became aware that the wide hall wherein he stood contained another occupant.

What he had at first taken for a bundle of old clothing on the floor, moved and took on the semblance of a man; and this ogreish thing fixed on him a pair of blazing eyes and gave utterance to a yell that seemed to come from the throat of an animal rather than that of a human being.

Under ordinary circumstances Clarkson Jinks was courageous enough, but this sudden encounter in the dimly-lighted hall with an undoubted maniac was sufficient to test the strongest nerves.

Clarkson trembled in spite of himself and gave a little cry of alarm as he stepped quickly backward.

How bad the maniac escaped from his cell? was a question that involuntarily presented itself.

But he was given no time to speculate on this. The unearthly shriek of the madman had aroused the occupants of the other cells, and they added their screams to the echoes that still resounded, and dashed themselves against the padded walls as if they meant to break out.

The madman straightened himself up, with his burning eyes still fixed on Clarkson, and with side-long, cat-like steps essayed to approach nearer, working his claw-like fingers the while in a manner that was horribly suggestive.

It was a situation such as Jinks had never before been in and which he had not dreamed of when making his way into the building. The screams and cries of the maniacs would undoubtedly rouse the keepers, and the result would be that he himself would be in danger of capture.

He attempted to retreat, as the madman approached him; but the latter, anticipating the movement, and, with a yell that was wilder and fiercer than any to which he had yet given utterance, he bounded straight at his intended victim.

Jinks threw up an arm to ward off the maniac's clutch; but the latter, instead of striving to avoid it, caught at it with his teeth, and Jinks was only saved from a severe biting by the thickness of his coat. Then the maniac, resistless in his onward rush, twined his long arms about the body of the crest-hunter and tried to drag him to the floor.

The attacked man resisted with all his might, made desperate by fear, and the knowledge that the keepers were hurrying to the scene of confusion. He could even then hear them as they called to each other, asking where the escaped man was, and how he had got out.

The madman was a very giant in strength; and as he struggled with the crest-hunter, he managed to secure and open the latter's knife. Of his own, he had no weapon, and as his hand closed on the knife-handle, he gave another yell of fierce rage.

Although Jinks fought with the energy of despair, yet he was but a child in the grasp of this wild man; and the furious creature now bent him to the floor, placed a knee on his chest, and lifted the knife aloft with a fiendish and joyful glee.

Jinks, seeing the dull gleam of the blade, and realizing his utter helplessness, gave himself up for lost.

The madman halted, however, just as he seemed on the point of plunging the knife into Clarkson's breast. He had heard the tramping sounds of the guards' footsteps. A crafty look came into the burning eyes, the head was craned sidewise like that of a listening animal, and the threatening knife came slowly down.

The crest-hunter saw the attitude and movement, and was wise enough not to re-attract attention to himself by any useless struggles.

The sounds of hurrying feet grew nearer, and the maniac, still clutching the knife, softly arose to his feet, and for a moment stood harkening.

Jinks remained upon the floor, not moving a muscle, and scarcely daring to breathe.

The madman had apparently forgotten him, and was now giving all his attention to the approaching guards. With sly and creeping steps he retreated from the place, breaking into a quick run when he had gained the corridor, and disappearing from the crest-hunter's view.

The flight of the madman was made at a time most opportune for Jinks, for it drew the attention of the guards to the retreating figure. Jinks had just time to squeeze himself into the niche of a door when the keepers hurried by in pursuit of the escaped lunatic. He heard the latter scream, as he caught sight of his pursuers, and the thud of his racing feet came back clearly.

From their small, barred windows, many of those confined in the cells had viewed the chase, and their discordant cries seemed to turn the building into a veritable bell.

Out of the midst of the clamorous confusion Clarkson Jinks heard his own name called, in tones that were not at all maniacal.

He started and looked about. Again the words came; and making his way in the direction from whence they proceeded, he approached a window at the corridor's further end.

"Is it you, Jinks? Thank God!"

The words were spoken by the Hummer from Hummingbird.

"Step up here and let us speak to you a minute. The guards will be back as soon as they catch that fellow. This is a terrible place. How did you get in here?"

"Is Sam with you?" Clarkson asked, coming close up to the window.

"You b-bet, old boy! Wh-wh-what's left of me. If I stay in here another w-week, I'll be a regular walking sh-shadow."

"It hasn't been a week," Clarkson corrected, endeavoring to smile, although he was touched by the hopeless lugubriousness of the sport's tones.

"It s-seems like a month."

There was no time for idle talk, and in hurried sentences the crest-hunter told why and how he had come there.

"It would do me a world of good to shake that loyal hand of yours," the Hummer declared, with choked utterance. "They are trying to drive us crazy, I think. They've put us in here with the incurables and incorrigibles, and what we've seen and heard is enough to turn the head of the sanest man that ever walked. If we ain't as gray as patriarchs when we get out of here—if we ever get out—will be to me the most surprising thing on the footstool."

"You'd better l-leave at once," Stuttering Sam urged. "Those r-rascals will be b-back here in a minute or two, and th-then you can't go. You can't d-do any good here, and it won't pay for you to g-get caught."

There was wisdom in this, as all three knew. The cells were so secured that it would have been a mere waste of time for Clarkson to attempt to open the one that held his friends.

"You know where we are, now," said the Hummer, cheerily, "and can take measures to get us out. If you can only escape from the building, yourself!"

The noise of a struggle and fierce screams told that the keepers had captured the escaped maniac, and they would soon be returning with him.

"I'll get out!" the crest-hunter boldly asserted. "And I'll see that you get out, too, my hearties! Keep a stiff upper-lip; don't let these fellows bulldoze you, and I promise you shall hear from me!"

He could not shake hands with them, but as an evidence that he wished to, he took one of his own in the other and shook it heartily.

"Now, good-by! I must be going."

The keepers were coming back with their struggling captive, and he glided away like a spirit, and was gone!

CHAPTER XXII.

SLOCUM WRAPS HIMSELF IN THE AMERICAN FLAG.

THE crest-hunter did not feel as sanguine about making his escape from the building as he professed, but thought it useless to burden his friends with his fears.

They had enough troubles of their own.

He was out of the corridor before the guards had returned, and while they were engaged in securing the maniac again in his cell, he descended to the ground floor.

He had hoped to find the door of the kitchen still unlocked, but was disappointed in this; and as he had no keys that would fit, he was forced to turn back and seek other means of exit.

For more than a half-hour, he moved stealthily from room to room and from corridor to corridor, trying every door and window, until he was almost ready to despair. Then he came upon a window he was able to force, and through which he made his way to the ground.

He did not tarry long within the inclosing walls. The gate was shut and barred, but he found a place by which he could mount.

Being now upon the outside, and feeling once more free, he hastened toward the city, giving many a backward glance in the direction of the building that had lately witnessed such stirring scenes and wherein he came near losing his life.

He immediately sought Cerro Cenci, and the two visited the residence of Jones Simpson. There an earnest consultation was held, in which Miss Nevada took a part; and the result was, that the four entered a carriage shortly after and were driven in hot haste to the office of the Hon. Fisher Slocum.

Slocum was not in; but a messenger sent to his residence quickly brought him.

"Ah!" he said, bowing patronizingly, as he introduced the quartette to his office. "Something out of the common to induce you to call at this time of night! Pray be seated."

He lighted and turned up the office lamp, and rubbed his pudgy hands together and smiled beamingly at Miss Nevada.

Jones Simpson was a man of business, and in a few direct words went to the heart of the matter.

"So you see how it is, Mr. Slocum. These men are are wrongfully held in a lunatic asylum, and we look to you to get them out!" he added in conclusion.

Snecker Slocum would have preferred them to come to him on almost any other mission. He saw at once that Father Petrie had had a hand in the matter, and being then engaged in an effort to win the good-will of all classes, he feared he might gain the enmity of the Catholic population if he made a movement against Petrie.

"I suppose there is no way in which this can be accomplished without resorting to legal proceedings?" he questioned, fighting to gain time in which to consider matters.

"You ought know if there is," Simpson asserted. "In my estimation the straight way is the best way. Then, we want this done up in legal shape, so that these asylum-keepers can not come down on them and drag them back there. That wouldn't do, you know!"

Miss Nevada added some words to those of her

father; and Slocum rubbed his fat face and became lost in reflection.

"You can't lose anything by it," Simpson interposed, shrewdly guessing what was in the politician's mind. "If I understand the case, Father Petrie's name is nowhere mentioned, and no fight need be made on him. The witnesses were a lot of rascally Mexicans of the lowest order, men without influence and whom nobody will care to defend. They are the fellows you will be called on to pitch into; and you can safely give it to them hot."

Slocum's brow cleared and a weight seemed to be lifted from his massive mind.

"I think you are right," he assented. "I'm in a somewhat ticklish position, now, you understand; and of course I don't want to do anything to lose me votes."

"We are as much interested in the successful issue of your candidacy as you are," Miss Nevada reminded him, with one of her rarest smiles.

"Very true," and Slocum expanded his big mouth in a pleased grin, for he liked to hear the musical tones of this young woman's voice. "I had not forgotten it. I never forget my friends!"

"Then you will prepare the necessary papers, and be at the court-room by eight o'clock in the morning?" Miss Simpson questioned.

"There is no resisting you," the amiable Slocum confessed. "I will be there promptly."

And having secured this promise, the quartette took their departure.

Having once made up his mind as to any course, Slocum was not slow to act; and the following morning Stuttering Sam and the Hummer from Hummingbird were brought before the county court. The politician had filed some very strong affidavits, and a writ had been promptly issued.

The official who had so foully abused his position in sending them to a lunatic asylum without proper examination got wind of the affair in time to make his escape. Likewise the witnesses, when they were sought for, were not to be found.

Slocum looked wise, but said nothing when this bit of information was brought to him; and those who knew the man best felt pretty certain that he had been instrumental in giving them warning.

Their presence was not necessary to the successful conduct of the case in hand; and the great Slocum had political reasons for not wishing to press these men too closely.

In similar manner, the superintendent and keepers of the asylum were left unmolested; and as it had been agreed that no proceedings should be commenced against Father Petrie or Jason Deel, there really seemed very little to do.

Nevertheless, the occasion was too important a one to be needlessly thrown away. If worked shrewdly, votes might be gained thereby, and what he had at first feared would be injurious to his interests could be turned to solid account.

Slocum was equal to his opportunities. As the alleged lunatics were brought in, he sat within the railing, perched in dignity in a large arm-chair, his brow ruffled in thought, and his pudgy hands clasped above his swelling abdomen.

It was a comfort to him to perceive that the court-room was rapidly filling. He felt that the victory would be achieved with ease, and it delighted him to have so many to witness the masterly manner in which he purposed to handle the case.

"Your Honor," he said, getting on his sturdy legs and unfurling a great roll of paper, when the time had come for action, "I have here a transcript of the records of the examination of these men, held before the justice a few days ago, and with your permission I shall proceed to read it."

The judge nodded assent; and in a full, oratorical voice Slocum read the copy of the records which had been that morning procured.

"I have here also the returns of the sheriff showing that the warrants, issued for the arrest of this man and the witnesses who so foully perjured themselves, have been returned, indorsed: 'Not found within this bailiwick!' thus showing that they have absconded."

"The showing made by these returns and by the copy of the justice's record, all of which I offer in evidence, is, I anticipate, all that will be needed to substantiate the material facts set forth in our affidavits."

"They show that these men were most foully and brutally treated in being thus deprived of their liberty without due cause and legal formality."

"Sir, a man's liberty is as dear to him as his life! It is guaranteed to him by our constitution as one of his inalienable rights. It is a feeling inherent in the breast of every true American and every patriot who loves this, the land of his birth."

"It was this feeling, your Honor, this love of liberty, which drove our Puritan ancestors across the stormy Atlantic to seek in the wilds of a New World the privileges which were denied to them in the Old."

"The love of liberty unshackled the gyres of the black man; and has been the elevating force

of the human race since the time when the Creator swung the plastic world into space and uttered the fiat: "Let there be light!"

"It was liberty that led the Spartan band under Leonidas; liberty that sped the arrow of William Tell, and in the person of Winkelreid grasped the murderous spears of the Austrians; liberty that guided the pen and tongue of Luther; and upheld the drooping spirit of our own immortal Washington.

"And yet, dear as liberty is to the human heart, these men, our fellow-citizens, were deprived of this precious heritage in this most atrocious manner; and this did not happen in the Dark Ages, but in the Nineteenth Century, in the city of Santa Fe, in the Territory of New Mexico!"

Having thus spread the pinions of his eloquence, Slocum dilated for more than an hour on the beauties and glories of American freedom, upholding the rights of the citizen, and scorching with bitter invective the men who had been guilty of the offenses against Hartsook and Hollingsworth. He soared, he raved, he ranted; he stamped the floor and tore his hair; figuratively speaking, he draped his massive proportions in the folds of the American flag, and hurled the thunderbolts of his wrath against his enemies.

It was a great speech; it must have been a great speech, for every one who heard it complimented Slocum and declared that they had never heard a greater!

Of course, the prisoners were released; and as they left the court-room, the enthusiastic crowd took the great Slocum upon their shoulders, bore him to the public Square, and gave him cheers, three times three, and a tiger!

CHAPTER XIII.

GARCIA'S GREAT FIGHT.

MANUEL GARCIA, the gladiator, had been one of the delighted and interested spectators of the scene occurring in the court-room; and cheers which greeted Slocum's pyrotechnic peroration were much added to in volume by the yells from his ponderous throat.

When Stuttering Sam and the Hummer from Hummingbird left the place, Garcia accompanied them.

He was rigged out that day in all the glory of his Mexican finery, for another bull-fight was to take place on the morrow; and besides, he had thought it policy to thus array himself when in attendance on the trial, for no man knew better than he the influence he wielded over the Mexican portion of the populace.

They took a roundabout way from the court-room, for the sport wished to visit his mine. The water had been pumped out of it some time before, but no work had been done therein since the day of the breaking of the embankment.

As they were returning from this visit, Stuttering Sam became aware that Tom Taulbee and his bridge men were at work over a creek further down the railway; and that unless they chose to turn out of the way, they would be compelled to pass them.

This the sport would have preferred to do, only that he observed that the bridge men had already seen them, and he did not care to thus show the white feather.

"If I had only known those fellows were there!" and he stopped and looked questioningly at the Hummer.

"It looks as if there might be a muss if we go on," the Hummer returned.

"Wh-why didn't you tell us they were there, Garcia? I don't like to g-g-get out of one trouble and right into an-another."

Garcia smiled and showed his white, even teeth.

"It pleases me!" he said. "They need a whipping, and if they bother us they'll get it."

He pushed on in advance of his companions as if resolved to give them no chance to turn aside.

There were six of the bridge men in addition to the foreman.

A scowl came to the scarred face of Taulbee, as he saw his enemies advancing, and he whispered a few words to his men.

On that route there was but one way to get into town, and that was by way of the bridge where Taulbee's men were working.

As Garcia and his friends drew near, the bridge men stepped aside as if to allow them to pass; but when they had gained the center of the bridge and were just opposite the glowering rascals, these rushed upon them with muttered cries of rage, brandishing their picks and shovels in a very threatening way.

The trio were not caught unawares, however. They had been expecting just such a movement, and were prepared for it.

The face of Taulbee, already hideous from the smallpox marks, was fairly fiendish now. He aimed a blow at the glittering form of the gladiator; but the blow was quickly and deftly parried, and he was knocked from his feet.

Hartsook and the sport were being pressed heavily by two of the other men. Feeling confident of an easy victory, these had dropped their weapons at the first rush, not wishing to inflict fatal injuries on their foes, but only to give them a good drubbing. As Taulbee fell

under the blow of the gladiator, the four not already engaged rushed upon Garcia.

The bull-fighter met them smilingly; but the four were more nearly a match for him than he had anticipated, for two of them coming at him from behind and two from the front, he was placed at a serious disadvantage.

But it was in times like these that the gladiator showed the greatness of his fighting qualities.

The struggle that ensued was terrific in its character. Backward and forward on the narrow structure the bull-fighter and his assailants swayed, seeming every moment in danger of toppling off.

Once the four nearly succeeded in dragging him down; but his strength was so mighty, that he arose like a veritable Samson and shook them off. But they came at him again, and again the fight waxed hot and furious.

As for Stuttering Sam and the Hummer from Hummingbird, they had their hands full, for the men who had tackled them were brawny giants of fellows, with sinews which had been hardened like steel by their labor. The sport succeeded in knocking out his assailant, and then turned to assist Hartsook, who was having a really hard time of it.

He found the little man down, with his stalwart foe atop of him, with fist lifted and a glare in his eyes that showed he meant to do the little man harm.

The coming of the sport changed the aspect of affairs. The big scoundrel was lifted off the body of the Hummer; and then by main force the sport tossed him into the stream that ran below.

As for Garcia, he had already served two of his adversaries in the same manner, and only two were now left to contend with him.

"Keep back!" he said, as he saw Stuttering Sam coming to his aid. "Let me alone with these fellows, will you? If I can't get away with them, I'm willing to be whipped!"

The words were panted rather than spoken, for the men, realizing that the fate of their comrades would be theirs, were fighting with the courage and vindictiveness of tigers.

In accordance with the gladiator's expressed wish, Stuttering Sam and Hartsook advanced no further; but contented themselves with watching the magnificent fight Garcia was making.

The man who had attacked the sport had regained his senses, and now sat up to rub his bruised head; but he had been taught a lesson in discretion, and made no effort to get on his feet and take a further hand in the affray.

The individual in front of him Garcia grasped about the waist, having found a favorable opportunity, and tossed into the boiling flood; and then turning quickly, he served the other in the same way.

Of the seven who had commenced the fight, but two remained upon the bridge, the foreman and Stuttering Sam's assailant; and these, although each had regained consciousness and felt vengeful enough, cared for no further experience in that line.

The men who had been thrown into the stream were swimming ashore at various points, all the fight taken out of them.

"Let them alone," said the sport, indicating the two on the bridge.

"I guess they've had enough," and the Hummer picked up his cuckoo-winged hat and placed it jauntily on his blonde head. "If they haven't they can speak up, and I've no doubt our good friend here will be very happy to accommodate them."

"As for those in the creek, the icy water will probably cool their wrath so that they'll come back quite gentlemanly fellows. No doubt they were in need of a bath, too!"

A rain was threatening, the heavy clouds hanging in inky masses to the northwest; and without staying to witness the reunion of the beaten men, the three passed on into the city.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GARCIA USES HIS TONGUE.

BEFORE they reached shelter, a tremendous rain had set in. When it does rain in the hot and arid climate of the Southwest, the result is a deluge; and this was no exception to the rule. The streets were flooded, and Santa Fe Creek rose to such a height that the bridge was torn out and many lives were imperiled, calling for some heroic deeds wherein our friends were not found wanting.

This unprecipitated down-pour promised to interfere sadly with the bull-fight billed for the following day. This would have been a great disappointment to the Mexicans; and therefore came off, though not exactly in accordance with the programme. The slipperiness of the ground brought Manuel Garcia a severe fall and a badly lacerated shoulder from the horns of one of the bulls.

When he was rescued from the arena, his admiring friends crowded about him in a regular crush, and kindly hands lifted him up and bore him to the hospital of the Mission of San Muerto.

It was some time before the padres who were

skilled in surgery, could ascertain the extent of the bull-fighter's injuries; but when they gave out that they were not of a fatal nor necessarily serious character, the clamorous crowd about the gate retreated to disseminate the joyful news.

Of all nurses, none waited on the injured man with the whole-hearted fidelity and faithfulness of Juanita Concha. Her very presence was to him a benediction, and he fancied that the touch of her soft hands was like the brush of angels' wings.

Through all the days of his illness, she hung constantly about him, anticipating his every need.

Although Father Petrie frowned and would have forbidden it if he could, the gladiator's friends were each day permitted to come in for a short time and see him; and thus Jinks and the Hummer and the Stuttering sport came within the walls, and saw and talked with the dark-robed nurse.

In many respects those were wearisome days to the gladiator, for being a man of action, he longed to get out into the freedom of the open air; but they were pleasant days, also, for they gave him an opportunity for unburdening his heart of a subject that had long pressed it.

"Juanita," he said one day, taking one of her hands in his big, harsh palms, "you love this man, Stuttering Sam?"

The girl flushed hotly, and would have drawn her hand away.

"Stay!" he implored, tightening his grasp. "I go away from here, soon, and I must speak to you before I go. Stuttering Sam is a worthy man, and he loves you as you love him. I've noticed you when he was here, and I've read your secret."

Although she hung her head and did not reply, she made no further attempt to disengage her hand.

"He is a brave man, Juanita; and I love brave men. And therefore I speak to you. You have heard of how he saved the poor woman on the bridge when the great flood came—the flood that brought me this?" indicating his hurt shoulder.

"Ah! it was a noble deed. There was a crowd on the bridge, and when the pier fell, eaten away by the rushing flood which the crowd had come to watch, the craven people ran, leaving a child there. It was a little child, with blue eyes and golden hair."

"As the crowd ran, they drew the mother away from the child and forced her along with them; but when she saw that the child had been left, she screamed and made straightway back to the bridge, which was then reeling and swaying like a *mescal* drinker."

"This man who loves you, the stuttering sport as he is called—ah! there is a nobility in that stuttering tongue—when he saw this woman and child upon the drunken bridge, he broke away from his friends, seized them both, and ran for the shore."

"Then, how we cheered—we who were watching! But he saw he could not reach the shore before the bridge went down, and he leaped with them both into the sucking stream; not in the direction in which the bridge would fall, but in the other."

"And as they went down beneath the water, the bridge rolled over just like a man drunk on *mescal*, and was swept away."

"We thought they would go, too, but he arose with them, and by swimming tried to reach the shore, where we stood shouting and tearing our hair. Then we threw ropes to him; and he drew himself out, and with him the woman and child."

The gladiator's eyes were shining and his breast heaving with the emotion he felt, as he concluded his narration. So brave an act touched all the finer chords of his nature.

He dashed away a tear, and fishing for a moment under his pillow, drew forth a newspaper which he had evidently carefully treasured. It contained a detailed account of the disaster to the bridge, and of Hollingsworth's heroism.

He unfolded it, and pushing it toward her, pointed with trembling finger to the column which held the account.

Garcia's manner of telling the story, which was decidedly Spanish, with many gestures, and a rolling of the eyes and heaving of the breast, had deeply touched Juanita. It would have touched her even had the chief actor in the rescue been other than he was.

She slowly read the account, dwelling on the heroic features in a manner to delight the soul of the bull-fighter, and when she had finished, folded up the paper and sat with it in her hands, looking intently at the floor.

"You may keep the paper," said Garcia. "I shall not care for it longer."

And when he had repeated the statement, she put away the paper, and came and sat down again by the bedside.

Then, with many glances to make sure that Father Petrie was not within hearing, he told her in whispered words how Stuttering Sam and the Hummer had been incarcerated in the insane asylum, and how they had been brought into court and released through the wonderful eloquence of the great Slocum, not forgetting to

make full mention of the exciting part which Clarkson Jinks had played in their rescue.

Through it all, Juanita Concha listened with mute astonishment. Such baseness passed her comprehension. And when the gladiator deliberately informed her of his belief that Father Petrie had had a hand in the affair, her amazement amounted almost to terror.

She had never liked Father Petrie, her fine instincts telling her that he was not a pure and honorable priest, but she had never believed that he could descend to such meanness.

The bull-fighter was wise in many things, and when he had told her all this, he left her to digest it and think over it at her leisure, feeling that such a course would more certainly accomplish his purpose than would any amount of persuasion.

When she came in to see him the next day, which was the one before that on which the doctors said he might leave the place, he put a note into her hand. It was not customary for her to receive notes, and she opened it with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

It was from Stuttering Sam.

The sport had called that morning, and been forbidden by Father Petrie to enter the place. In the visits which he had already made he had never had the courage to refer again to the subject of their first interview. Although he had frequently promised himself that he would make to her due apology for what he had said on that occasion. The sport had really had no chance, for when he had met her at the bedside of the gladiator, it had always been in company with others. And now he would be unable to come there any more.

In this note the sport recounted these facts, and formally apologized for the words of love he had spoken to her when he had himself been an inmate of the hospital.

He characterized them as rude and ungentlemanly in that they were not suited to the time or the occasion, but he carefully avoided any statement calculated to lead her to think that what he had then said was untrue.

"I can not write to him," she said. "It would not be meet and proper for me to do a thing of the kind. But you will tell him that I have long ago forgotten—" she stopped and hesitated for the proper word—"have long ceased to think that he was rude and harsh, if I ever thought so. But, indeed, he must never speak that way to me again. My life is given to this work—I am the bride of the Church, and can not think of him in—in that way, nor of any one!"

She was almost wrought to tears, as she made this declaration; and the really kind-hearted gladiator forbore comment or question.

The next day he left the hospital, without a chance for a further interview.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MYSTERY.

THE visits which Stuttering Sam had paid to Manuel Garcia in the hospital, whereby he was able for a few brief moments to see and speak to Juanita Concha, had filled him with more than his usual unrest.

He was the first to greet the gladiator when the latter came out, and the words which Garcia told him concerning Juanita he treasured in his heart. They gave him hope and courage. His note had not offended her, Garcia said, and this was a great point. In his admiration for the man, the bull-fighter did his best to recall everything of an encouraging character which the girl had said, and he did this very admirably.

So absorbed was the sport in thoughts of this woman, that he neglected many of the duties devolving upon him, and gave himself up to long strolls to think of her. The Hummer called this "mooning," and took frequent occasions to rally his friend about his condition, and to deplore the low state into which he had fallen.

"They'll have you back in that asylum in another month, and for good cause," he commented. "You are worse than the love-distracted poet:

"Your only books
Are woman's looks,
And folly's all they've taught you!"

"My dear friend, my good friend, do be sensible for a minute. The world is filled with sparkling eyes, and shining teeth, and flowing hair, and swan-like necks, and all that. It's really full to overflowing. And there are luscious lips by the cart-load; or would be, if they could be disengaged and put into portable form. So stop your mooning and do be sensible!"

On this subject, however, it was impossible for the sport to maintain an equal mental balance. He was cool enough and quiet enough about everything else, but here all his visions were rose-colored.

There were two who thoroughly sympathized with him in all his moods and depressions. They were Cerro Cenci and Nevada Simpson. Their own love for each other made them keenly alive to the pains that tormented the sport.

Stuttering Sam did not seek sympathy from

any one, but preferred to be alone, or mingling with a crowd of congenial spirits.

As he was returning from one of his moonlight strolls, when near the Golconda, he received a start similar to that given him on the night of his card-duel with Jason Deel.

Before him there seemingly appeared the very girl who had been so constantly in his thoughts. The light was not of the best, but the form and figure were the same, the dress was the same, and even the carriage and pose of the head were identical.

As he came into the full glare of the gaslight, she turned and looked at him, and so sure did he feel that the one he saw was Juanita Concha, that he would have been willing to risk his reputation for truth upon it.

For a moment he stood transfixed with astonishment, and a thrill that was akin to fear shot through him. He had told her that if what he had seen at the Golconda was not she, it was her ghost; and these words recurred to him as he looked at this apparition.

She had told him that she never passed beyond the walls of the San Muerto Mission after night-fall, and he was compelled to believe her. Then, who was this who had so suddenly appeared before him?

After giving him that one quick look, the woman turned and walked in the direction of the Mission.

He called after her; but if she heard the call, it only served to hasten her steps.

A new idea came to him like a flash.

"It is Juanita Concha, and she is a sleep-walker! That ac-ac-accounts for it. She will injure herself I-likely!"

So impressed was he by this thought, that notwithstanding he felt it to be a base thing to thus follow an unprotected woman, he hurried after her.

He did not break into a run, a thing he really desired to do, for he would have given much for a good view of her face, but walked on at a quick pace, timing his footsteps to keep her in sight.

She did not once look back, seeming not to know or care if she had been noticed or pursued, but kept straight on in the direction of the Mission.

"Somebody ought to k-kick me for this," the sport muttered. "This ain't really any of my b-business; and if I had good hard sense I'd go b-back to my room and stay there. But I'm a f-f-fool, I guess, and ain't I-likely to get o-over it in a hurry!"

Nevertheless, even while telling himself this, he kept on after the girl, finding himself powerless to turn back.

There was a space near the Mission walls utterly given up to gloom, and in this patch of blackness she disappeared. There were many avenues by which she might have gone from here without being observed by the sport. These avenues he did not pay any attention to, but kept his eyes on the Mission gate, which was in the moonlight beyond.

She did not reappear and go on to the gate, and much puzzled by this, the sport advanced into the gloomy area and sought for an explanation.

He saw where she could have turned down a side street, and there was also an alley by which she could have gone out. He looked down these, but could see her nowhere. He wondered if she could have gone into any of the adobes near, and put aside the notion as absurd. All the while he had been turning his gaze toward the Mission gate, thinking she might yet approach it. But she did not; and he was not long in convincing himself that she had not remained in the darkness near the walls.

"This b-beats me!" he sputtered. "Kn-knocks me clean out! I never heard that sleep-walkers had wings, though I've n-never been much acquainted with any of th-them. If that was Juanita, I'd j-just like to know wh-where she went, that's all!"

Again he looked up and down the street and alley, then rubbed his eyes and stared at the Mission gate.

"This m-makes me feel like I had been following a g-ghost, for sure!"

That thrill of fear came to him again. There was something so eerie and uncanny in it all!

A half-dozen times he made the circuit of the shadows near the wall, beating about in every direction, though from the first, he knew that nothing could result therefrom.

When he started after the girl, he had had an apprehension that he might be walking into a trap as he had done before, and throughout the way, he had narrowly watched for anything of a suspicious character. He had seen nothing to cause alarm, and the apprehension had vanished; but now as he stared into the blackness about him, he half expected to see Tom Taulbee and his men rushing on him.

Not a suspicious sound was heard, though; and for want of anything better to do, he walked over to the Mission gate. He found it locked and barred, just as he knew it would be.

"If I'd b-been drinking anything, I'd think the tr-tremens had got b-b-hold of me. But I haven't, honestly touched I-liquor for so-so long that I've nearly f-forgotten the t-taste of it. I

j-just can't d-do the subject justice! I ought to have the H-Hummer here!"

For more than a half-hour he searched the shadows in the vicinity of the Mission gate, passing up and down the full length of the alley and the side street; and was forced to go away more mystified than he had been for many a day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JUMPING A MINE.

JASON DEEL was not in a pleasant frame of mind, as he sat in his office a week or two after the release of the sport and the Hummer from the asylum for the insane. He was annoyed and vexed beyond measure. All his plans had come to naught, and he was apparently unable to make any headway against the forces combined against him.

He pushed back the papers, which for many minutes he had not looked at, and rising, strode nervously up and down the room. There were lines of care on his not unhandsome face, and patches of grayish tinge began to show in his black beard and hair.

"I must checkmate them in some way," he mentally soliloquized. "If I don't they will ruin me."

No one knew better than he, that the claims of young Cerro Cenci were just and right. He had obtained the property by frauds of the blackest character. He had already been a comparatively wealthy man, and the income from the Cenci estate had made him very rich. That estate and the income it brought him he could not think of giving up. He would not give it up without a desperate fight to retain it. He had long ago made up his mind to that.

In quick review the events of the past few months flitted before him; and as he recalled how he had been baffled at every turn, he ground his teeth in rage.

Before him rose the sweet, dark face of Juanita Concha, and a scowl blacker than usual distorted his features. For some reason, he feared and hated her quite as much as he feared and hated any one of the men pitted against him. His fingers worked convulsively, and in imagination, he felt himself choking the life out of the girl's slight form.

"I could kill her!" he hissed, under his breath. "I could kill her, freely!"

And yet to all outward seeming, she had never harmed him.

Then his thoughts turned again to Hartsook and Hollingsworth, and to Clarkson Jinks and the gladiator. His reasons for fearing these men were sufficiently plain.

A smile that was almost fiendish in its expression curled his lips, as he thought of the little old Mexican whose mysterious disappearance had caused them so much anxiety and trouble.

"I presume they'd give me a pretty penny if I'd just point out to them where the old scamp is to be found! The chattering scoundrel! That limber tongue of his came mighty near doing the job for me. If I hadn't had a good friend in that adobe to bring me news of the affair, I'd have been in hot water before this."

Thoughts of the spy who had thus favored him caused his features to lose some of their grim sternness. The spy was a neighbor of the old man, who had slipped into the adjoining room for a friendly chat. His entrance had been noiseless, and the Mexican's visitors were not aware of his presence. The first words he caught caused him to crouch in a silent, listening attitude; and he had heard nearly everything that was said.

He remained undiscovered; and as soon as the gladiator and the Hummer had departed, he came to Deel with the information thus obtained. The result was, that the old man was removed from the adobe that night and placed where it would be difficult to find him.

"I'll have to give him another gold-piece for that," Deel muttered, still continuing his walk and thinking of the spy. "Such work is invaluable, and can never be paid for too well. Yes, I'll have to drop down upon him and give him another gold-piece!"

He sat down at his desk and strove to look over the papers which had accumulated thereon; but he was entirely too restless and nervous, and soon got up and resumed his walk.

"It would have been a bad blow, if they had secured the old fool's evidence! When people get so old that they lose their wits, they outlive their usefulness and ought to step off the stage for other men."

"There's one comfort, they can't get at the other witness and the notary. They'd have to dig up some dead men to do that. It was a lucky thing for me that they ran into that case of small-pox and got it so bad that they never recovered. If they hadn't, I should have had three men to watch, instead of one. And then that stopped the payments to them; and that was a big thing."

"I'm glad I induced Father Petrie to burn those San Muerto records. This gathering and keeping of the histories and papers of the old Spanish families is a grand nuisance. The quicker they are destroyed and forgotten, the better for such fellows as me!"

The unintended sarcasm in the words struck him amusingly, and he smiled as he stopped for a moment to look out of the window; but the frown came back when he resumed his walk.

"There is one other paper I'd like to get hold of and serve in the same way. That's the letter which old Cenci wrote just before his death. It's got into Cerro's possession some way, and that's what started him."

Deel had not known until recently that there was such a paper in existence. The knowledge had come to him through one of his numerous spies who had overheard the Hummer and Cenci conversing about it. It was a letter, written by the elder Cenci when on his death-bed, and directed to his children. From what the spy had gathered, it was a will, also, as much as a letter; and it stated that the great landed estate which had been in the Cenci family was still unincumbered, and he wished it to remain so and descend entire to the Cenci posterity. There was no hint that a sale was contemplated.

The strongest proof afforded by this letter that Jason Deel had come into the estate through fraud was that it bore a date subsequent to that of the deed which had been recorded.

There were only two ways out of the dilemma thus presented. The deed was a forgery, or the elder Cenci was insane when he wrote that last letter to his children.

Cerro had not been with his father in this last illness, nor had he seen him for many years before. But he had conversed with men who had been on terms of intimate acquaintance with his father in the last months of his life; and these men had assured him that the elder Cenci was entirely sane and had remained so to the day of his death.

The records, however, could not be so easily got over. It is true that a suit might have been commenced against Jason Deel. But the issue of that suit would have been doubtful, for Deel was a wealthy man, and would unquestionably use his wealth to defeat the ends of justice. By the very nature of the case, he would have been compelled to do this, for if the forgery was shown, he would not only lose the land, but would suffer imprisonment.

"The battle isn't won, yet," Deel commented, as he thought of all these things, for his spies had followed young Cenci so closely that he was acquainted with everything that had taken place. "The fight hasn't been fought to a finish, and I may be defeated in the end. But I will not be defeated! Let me think!"

He sat down at his desk, and placing his forehead in his hands, gave himself up to meditations.

A little later he arose and returned to his impatient striding up and down the room.

"Yes; I will do it! I can't think of any other way to annoy them. I must give them some work of their own to do. I tried it before, and for a time it worked successfully."

He put on his hat; then glancing at his watch and seeing that it was nearly an hour till noon, he put it off again and resumed his walk, occasionally muttering to himself, and in other ways showing the mental strain to which he was subjected.

When a half-hour had passed, he again took up his hat, and left the office.

He went direct to the boarding-house of Tom Taulbee; and when the bridge foreman came to his dinner, he indicated to him that he desired another interview.

When they were closeted together in the foreman's room, Deel plied Taulbee with questions.

"It's been over a month since the water went into the mine?"

"A good deal more!"

"And how long since Stuttering Sam has had any work done there?"

Taulbee gave himself up to a moment's reflection.

"That's been more than a month!" he declared, after due consideration.

"You're sure?"

"Purty tol'able sure!"

"Well, that's an important point, for I want you to jump that mine before the sun goes down. If he hasn't done any work on it inside of thirty days, you can jump it and hold it. And it's a piece of property that's worth something."

The mine was a tempting lure, but the foreman remembered the last encounter he and his men had had with Sam and his friends, and the remembrance served to check his ardor.

"It'll be a ticklish piece of biz," he remarked, "and I can't say that I'm bankerin' to undertake it. He ginerly gits that big gladiator to do his fightin' fer 'im, an' I'm free to say that I ain't in love with the feller's fists. I'd nigh about as soon be struck with a sledge-hammer. You never run ag'in' them fists, I reckon?"

"I haven't had the pleasure," and Deel laughed at the seriousness of the foreman's words.

"If you ever do, you'll be apt to rec'lect it!"

"If you jump the mine and hold it, you'll get the mine, and in addition I'll pay you well."

The bridge foreman twisted his heel into the floor, and looked intently at the nail-print thus made.

"Blamed if I don't try it, any way! I owe the feller a grudge that I don't really s'pose I can ever pay, no matter how much dirt I do

him. You'll find me inside of that mine before the sun goes down, and I'll stick to it or bust!"

He was true to his word; and before the coming of darkness, information was brought to Stuttering Sam that the mine had been jumped by Tom Taulbee, and that he now held it with an armed force.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MINE REGAINED.

JASON DEEL in making this movement against Stuttering Sam had by no means shot all the arrows out of his quiver. He had moved with his usual celerity; and even while the sport was considering what movement he should begin against Taulbee, and conferring with his friends concerning it, word was brought that the great *espada*, Manuel Garcia, had been degraded from his position through the influence of Father Petrie, and would no longer appear in the arena to delight his admiring friends.

This was a blow from an unexpected quarter; and it was a serious one, too, for this degradation would in all probability lose to Garcia the smiles and favors of the fickle populace. To Sucker Slocum the removal was especially distasteful, for if Garcia's influence were dissipated, the votes he could control would vanish also.

The gladiator, himself, came to the sport's room that night, over the Golconda, and conferred with his friends concerning the matter.

Hartsook was present, as was also Clarkson Jinks; and while they condoled with him over the misfortune thus brought about by treachery, they endeavored to lay plans which should reinstate him in the place he had filled so acceptably.

The next morning, almost before the arrival of the customary hours of business, a dapper little man, in a business suit of tweed, called upon the Hummer. He was a very affable little man, and very polite and persuasive in his manners.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance," he observed with calm placidity, when he had been invited to a seat. "I have frequently heard of you, Mr. Hartsook, and have desired to meet you."

"A funny fancy, that of yours!" glancing at the cuckoo-winged hat which hung in its place on the rack. "Very odd and unique. And the—ah—singular title you bear, the Hummer from Hummingbird! All very uncommon and original. I presume there is a history back of the title?"

"A bit of a one!" and the Hummer gave his blonde mane a characteristic shake, as he thought of the great fight he and Old Adamant had made at the mining town of Cuckoo.

"I knew it!" the little man warmly asserted. "A man doesn't gain such a title and such a reputation without doing something out of the ordinary."

Hartsook wondered what the dapper individual, who had given his name as James Lemon, meant by all this fulsome flattery. That there was a point to be gained, he very well knew.

His visitor was not long in reaching it.

"I am in the employ of the new railway," with a questioning glance and a premonitory cough, "and I have been sent here by the superintendent to offer you the position of General Auditor."

The Hummer was scarcely able to conceal his surprise, for the superintendent was a man wholly unknown to him.

The railway—which, by the way, was never completed and proved to be something of a fraud in the end—was on a seemingly sure foundation, and paid its officers and employees well.

"I am at a loss to understand why I have been thus honored," he confessed. "I never knew that I was considered an expert accountant, and as for the general business of railways, I know very little about them. I have ridden in their coaches, and that is about all."

The little man puckered his lips in a mysterious way.

"The superintendent understands your qualifications, perhaps, better than you do yourself. He is a shrewd and capable man, and seldom makes mistakes in matters of this kind. At any rate, I am authorized to offer you the position of General Auditor, with a salary of four hundred dollars a month, beginning with the first of the present month."

It was an offer which, at any other time, the Hummer might have been glad to accept, for he felt that he could fill the place satisfactorily. Just now, instead of thinking of the tempting salary, he was wondering why the office had been tendered to him.

"Of course I should have to reside at the company's headquarters?"

"Of course!" and Lemon smiled in a way intended to be conciliatory, but which at the time was to the Hummer extremely aggravating.

The knowledge that he would be compelled to leave Santa Fe in case he accepted the place cast light on the mysterious affair. He had discovered some time before that Jason Deel was one of the principal directors and stockholders in the new railway; and he now felt sure that

it was Deel that had induced the superintendent to thus tempt him.

He was working for Cerro Cenci, and had given his whole heart to the young man's service, yet it was with the understanding that if they failed to regain the Cenci estate, he would receive nothing for all his work and trouble; for in that event, young Cenci would have nothing with which to pay.

Now, if Jason Deel by the offer of a lucrative position remove him permanently from the present seat of warfare and from the service of Cerro Cenci, it would be a great point in his, Deel's, favor; for no one knew better than Jason Deel that the Hummer from Hummingbird was the real force and backbone of the movement against him.

A humorous twinkle came into Hartsook's eyes, as these thoughts passed quickly through his mind.

"I think I see the cause of the milk in the cocoanut!" he said to himself.

Then aloud:

"Tell your superior that I'm very much obliged to him for his most generous offer, but that really I couldn't afford to accept, as the town of Santa Fe couldn't get along without me."

"And then," glancing at the hat with its cuckoo-wings, "if I became the head of a department in a railway office, I should have to stop wearing that. The gay young clerks would become gayer and friskier if their chief indulged in such frivolities. No, no, my dear sir! It would ruin the auditing department, and that might eventually bring about the downfall of the railway itself. Great aches from little acorns grow, you know!"

The dapper individual stared as if his eyes would pop out of their sockets. He had never encountered just another such man as the Hummer from Hummingbird, and was at a loss whether to take his oddities for their irregularities of an eccentric genius, or to consider that the Hummer was poking fun at him and his offer.

"Do I understand you to decline the offer?" the thing passing his comprehension. He was only a clerk in the office of the superintendent at a salary of a hundred dollars a month, and that any one should not desire to become General Auditor at a salary of four hundred a month, was passing strange. Surely the Hummer was on the verge of insanity!

"Oh, I'm all right," Hartsook asserted, guessing at the meaning of the stare. "I did put up at the lunatic asylum, a few days; but the keepers were mighty glad to get rid of me in the end. But I sha'n't go there again, unless your superintendent prefers charges of insanity against me for this declination. The very fact that I don't jump at the offer would be proof enough, no doubt, to a good many men in this town. But my board-bill is paid, and I can stand off my washwoman another month. If she refuses to work on those terms, I can turn my linen."

A conviction that if the Hummer was not a lunatic, he was little better, was forcing itself on the little man.

"Of course, if you refuse, that settles it!" and he took up his hat to depart.

"So long! if you must be going. If the superintendent raises the offer to a thousand, come back and see me."

And when the railway envoy was gone he departed also to recount the events of the morning to Stuttering Sam.

The sport was not to be found in the city, and Hartsook learned by inquiry that he had taken a force of men, together with Cerro Cenci, Jinks and the gladiator, and had gone out to the jumped mine.

"There's to be blood on the moon, eh?" Hartsook observed to his informant. "Well, I must be in at the death."

In spite of his jauntiness, he was really anxious, for he knew that the chances for a fight at the mine were of the best.

The sounds of firing, as he came within bearing distance, quickened his footsteps; and when he drew nearer, he saw that a regular siege was in progress. The sport had thrown his forces around the mouth of the mine, determined to keep Taulbee and his men in there until he had starved them into surrendering.

"Th-those fellows haven't the sh-shadow of a right to the m-mine!" Stuttering Sam explained, in answer to the Hummer's queries as to progress. "I l-l-looked the thing up last night, after you w-went away, and I f-f-found that they were too f-fast by just a day. They made a mis-cue in their cal-culations, and j-jumped the thing just twenty-f-four hours too soon."

"That's all that s-saved me. No d-doubt they thought they had me foul, but I'm on t-top, yet."

"Why don't you oust them by legal procedure?"

"Because I pr-prefer to w-worry them all I can. Old D-Deel's behind this thing, and if I b-brought suit, he'd p-put up the money for a big fight, and it'd cost me like th-thunder before I got through with-with it. I've got them cor-raled in there n-now, and I'm g-going to k-k-keep them there t-til they're ready to cry quits."

"I told you you'd get into trouble if you didn't quit your mooning," and the Hummer shook his

blonde hair prophetically. "I reckon there were two or three weeks in which you didn't know that you had a mine."

A shot from one of the men near by brought a stop to the conversation, and turned their attention to the siege. No harm had been done by the shot, it having been fired merely as a warning to one overbold fellow who had poked his head up from the shaft to ascertain the state of affairs.

For an hour there was no further movement or demonstration among Taulbee's men. Then, when the bridge foreman fancied that the long quiet had lulled his foes into a feeling of security, there came a grand rush or sortie.

Not all of Taulbee's men were engaged in it, a few being left to retain possession of the mine. They came with a yell, and directing their advance toward what they supposed to be the weakest point of the sport's line, endeavored to break it and drive it back.

For a time the fight raged hotly, and many serious blows were given and received; with the result that Taulbee's men were driven back into the mine, after which the cordon was drawn more closely.

For two days and two nights, this singular state of affairs existed, at the end of which time a flag of truce floated above the shaft. Hunger had conquered, and Taulbee was ready to surrender.

He had been beaten again by Stuttering Sam; and Jason Deel, when he heard the news, became more furious and vindictive than ever.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NOVEL WARFARE.

JASON DEEL was fertile in resources, and although the failure of this movement against Stuttering Sam was a sore disappointment to him, he yet took immediate steps to overcome its bad effects.

After casting about for a plan, he called on Jones Simpson. He was perfectly aware of the nature of the relations existing between Cerro Cenci and Simpson's daughter, and he also knew that Simpson had become one of the Cenci's allies.

Simpson was up to his eyes in a new real estate venture which promised enormous profits. So engrossed in it, in fact, that he could scarcely think or talk of anything else.

This venture was no less than the platting and placing on the market of another of his numerous additions to the city; the said addition being in the vicinity of the grounds selected by the new railway company for their shops and yards.

By day and by night Simpson talked of this addition, praised its advantages, its accessibility to the proposed works, the beauty of its location, and the thousand-and-one charms which only a real estate boomer of the enthusiastic sort can see.

And it is safe to assume that Simpson believed all he said, for his mental make-up and the lenses through which he looked were fashioned somewhat after the pattern of stained-glass windows, transforming the light which came through them.

If the new addition had been located in a marsh, Simpson would still have found beauties in it and points on which to admiringly expatiate.

"A nice plot of ground you've got here!" Deel declared, having come on Simpson while the latter was placing in position one of the corner stakes, the boomer being at the time alone.

"I think so!" and Simpson smiled, for a compliment of this character from even a man like Deel was not displeasing. "In my judgment, it's the very finest piece in the city."

"Now, this is a magnificent lot," indicating the one just under their eyes. "It is a corner lot, too, and two hundred dollars takes it. It will be worth five hundred inside of a month. You ought to have this lot, Deel. There's no reason why you should not make that three hundred dollars as well as any other man."

"No, I presume not," and Deel took a folded paper from his pocket. "But I've gone into the real estate business myself. You see those blocks over there, just adjoining yours? I've got the deed for them here, and I'm going to lay them off into a new addition to-morrow morning."

Simpson had thought of buying those very lots to forestall anything of the kind, and it was not pleasant to know that Jason Deel had got ahead of him.

"That is, I may lay them off," Deel corrected. "It depends on you, Simpson, whether I do or not."

Simpson's look was the very biggest kind of an interrogation point.

"There is no good reason on earth why you and I shouldn't be on good terms and the very best of friends. No reason but one, Simpson, and that's of your own making. You've taken it into your head to champion the fool claim of Cerro Cenci, when you ought to know as well as any one that there is nothing in it."

A shadow came to the energetic face of the boomer.

"You have been led to do this, I know, by misrepresentation. You are not to blame for

that, perhaps; but you will be to blame if you continue it after I have informed you of the truth. If you will take the trouble to look at the records—and you are a business man, Simpson, and know what such things are when you see them—you will see that this young man's claim really hasn't a leg to stand on."

The things that had been told him concerning this very matter recurred to Simpson's memory, but he hesitated to speak of them until Deel fully declared himself.

"You haven't seen the record?"

"Others have told me about it. I never examined it myself—had too many other things to look after."

"That's what I thought. You can take my word for it that it's just as I say. The title is as straight as a string, and any lawyer will tell you that it hasn't the shadow of a cloud on it."

"Cenci's got hold of an old letter written by his father, and that letter has led him to think that he has a claim to it; and he has got a lot of other fellows to assist him in making a fight on me. Now, nothing can come of this to the benefit of the young man; and, as I understand he is to become your son-in-law in the near future, I thought you might be able to exert some influence over him."

The shadow returned to Jones Simpson's face, and it was blacker than before. He did not like this dragging of his daughter's affairs into the conversation.

"I have a business proposition to make," Deel went on, not heeding the other's black looks. "It is this. If you will induce Cenci to abandon this foolish fight, which can only result in harm to him, I will not put those lots on the market, and by holding them will keep any one else from doing so, and you can have things all your own way down here."

There was a tinge of red in Simpson's face, and the pupils of his eyes glittered so that they seemed points of fire.

"Hear me through," Deel implored, determined to have his say. "I am one of the stockholders of the new railway, and have considerable influence with the superintendent and board of directors. Now, I'm not afraid of Cenci, but his warfare on me is becoming exceedingly annoying, and the stories that he and his friends have been circulating are calculated to seriously cripple me in a business way. That's why I want the thing stopped; and if you'll take him off my back, I will not only make it worth your while, but worth his."

"I should have gone to him in the first place, and not have bothered you at all, only that I knew it would be of no use. He is so set in his way, and so convinced, and altogether so bull-headed, that it would be a mere waste of time for me to talk to him."

"Now, as to my proposition: I will not only withhold these lots from the market, but will secure for him a lucrative position in the service of the new railway; and by lucrative, I mean a position that will pay him at least five thousand a year. And in addition, I will transfer to him fifteen thousand dollars' worth of my stock in the road."

The fire that seemed to lie behind Simpson's glittering pupils was almost flaming now.

"Deel, you remind me of a certain scaly individual of old, who, as a strong temptation to his enemy, offered to transfer to him the whole of the world, when he didn't own a foot of it. The case isn't exactly parallel, perhaps, for you do own something. But the scaly gentleman knew that if his enemy was not removed, his own downfall would result, and in that respect the two tally exactly."

Deel flushed hotly, and his hands trembled until the paper which he held fairly shook.

"Now, I don't propose to go into any combination with you whatever. If you wasn't mortally afraid of Cenci, you wouldn't make such offers. So you can put your lots on the market in the morning, and we'll see who is the best rustler in making sales. If you want to crowd a fight onto me, you can have all you want of it."

He turned his back on Deel and began to hammer at the corner stake which he had been setting in place; and the latter, seeing that further talk was worse than useless, wisely withdrew.

The next morning the new blocks were platted and thrown on the market at ruinously low rates. But Jones Simpson was a born boomer and knew how to meet his opponent at every turn.

He did not lower his prices because Deel had done so; but he secretly induced a number of parties to buy up Deel's lots one by one at the prices at which they were offered; and before Deel was aware of it, every lot in this new addition had passed into Simpson's hands.

As soon as this was accomplished, the rates were advanced to correspond with those in Simpson's addition, and the whole were sold at a big profit to the astute boomer, and to Deel's discomfiture and chagrin.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CLEVERLY CAUGHT.

THE frequent efforts to injure him made by Tom Taulbee and his bridge men gave Stutter-

ing Sam much uneasiness, for he felt that these men would very naturally endeavor to avenge their numerous defeats. To give them no further excuse for attempts on the mine, he had regular work commenced therein; but he studiously avoided going near the bridge men while they were at work on the railway, hoping by this to prevent further trouble.

He had been so often attacked by them that he maintained at all times a wary caution, and was particularly on the watch against traps.

The blow he anticipated came, but in a manner rather unexpected.

Two or three nights after he had succeeded in ousting the bridge gang from the mine, he had had a long consultation in his room with Clarkson Jinks and the Hummer from Hummingbird. When they had departed, he tipped his chair back against the wall and gave himself up to thoughts on the subjects discussed.

After a time his mind wandered to Juanita Concha, and to speculations over her last mysterious appearance.

He was aroused from this by a stealthy step in front of the door of his room. The sounds ceased almost instantly, but were followed by a scratching noise, as if some one were endeavoring to insert a key in the lock.

Under such circumstances, the mind of the sport was always quick to act. He knew that it was long past midnight, and that a reasonable supposition would be that he was in bed, and sound asleep.

Very obviously some one was trying to enter the room, for purposes of robbery, or worse. He thought of the bridge foreman, and leaped to the instant conclusion that whoever might be at the door, it was not robbery that was sought.

Not the half of a second was consumed in these reflections. Then, as it was evident that the night-prowler would soon be able to insert the key, Stuttering Sam tip-toed softly to the bed and threw back the covering.

When he had done this, he grasped a roll of clothing and deposited it in the bed, drawing the covering over it and over the pillow in a way to make it seem that a man was lying there.

Having accomplished this, he moved stealthily to the foot of the bed, and concealed himself behind some garments depending from the wall, and at the same time drew and quietly cocked his revolver.

He had been sitting in the semi-gloom of the room, having turned out the light after the departure of Jinks and the Hummer, and the darkness pervading the apartment promised to aid materially in the deception he hoped to practice.

The blackness would have been of an inky character, had it not been for the moonlight that came through one uncurtained window, and fell across the lower portion of the bed, and against the door and a section of the wall. He was not in the moonlight, but the man at the door would be forced to pass through it if he entered.

The sport looked at the seeming form of a man lying in the bed, and was pleased by its naturalness.

He had not accomplished his work too soon, for he barely had time to draw the garments about him and get his revolver in readiness, when he heard the key turn softly in the lock, and the bolt shoot back with a spiteful little click.

A moment later the door was noiselessly pushed open, and the head and shoulders of a man appeared.

The moonlight fell fairly in the fellow's face, and the stuttering sport saw that the scoundrel was a swarthy-visaged Mexican, of a most brutal type.

The man did not immediately enter, but glared at the bed with his black, beady eyes, as if anxious to make sure that the occupant of the bed was really asleep.

He then moved in a step further, and a keen, long-bladed poniard, which he held in his right hand, gleamed dully in the faint light.

The man was meanly clothed, and wore no shoes, and his bare feet made scarcely a sound, as he pushed them over the floor.

His entire attitude showed that he felt he had in the supposed occupant of the bed a dangerous man to deal with, and that he must therefore exert every care and be ready to fly at the first sound of the waking of his intended victim.

Step by step, he made his way slowly across the room, leaving the door sprawled widely open behind him to facilitate a retreat should it become necessary.

When he had gained the bedside, he drew himself erect and lifted the poniard for a blow.

So deathly quiet was the room at the time that the sport could even hear the villain's suppressed breathing.

For an instant the knife hung in mid-air, then it descended like a beam of light, driven with such force that it passed through the bed-clothing to the hilt.

Before the blow could be repeated, or the Mexican could guess the nature of the deception practiced on him, Stuttering Sam leaped quickly to the door. One motion served to close it;

and then with his back against it he leveled his revolver on the miscreant.

Never was a man so bewildered and astounded. An inkling of the truth had come to him, brought by the failure of the poniard to eat through flesh and bone; but not until he heard the quick footsteps and the closing of the door, did he comprehend the nature of his peril.

"Th-throw up your hands!" came the stern command.

With lightning quickness the Mexican wheeled, so startled that he forgot to withdraw the poniard from its sheath of bed-clothing; and as his ears drank in the stern command, and his eyes beheld the threatening revolver, his face took on a dirty, yellowish tinge, and he fairly reeled in fright.

"Throw up your hands!" the sport repeated.

"Si, senor!" and the hands went up with surprising celerity.

"That's s-sensible!" keeping him covered with the revolver and at the same time closing the door more securely and slipping the bolt into place. "We'll get along f-first rate together if you don't take a fool n-notion to try to put your hand back on that s-s-sticker. I guess you'd better m-move to the other end of the bed, and then you'll be out of the w-way of temptation."

The Mexican was almost palsied with fear, but he obediently shuffled in the direction indicated.

"G-good boy! We'll be on excellent terms directly. If you m-m-mind everything I say, I don't see h-how I can quarrel with you."

"Now, take that ch-chair there, and we'll have a friendly talk."

He motioned to the chair with his left hand, never once lowering the revolver held in his right.

The craven rascal obeyed almost as mechanically as an automaton, his knees smiting each other as he crouched submissively in the chair.

The sport deliberately seated himself in another, taking care to place the chair so that the moonlight would fall on both himself and the Mexican.

"If this th-thing wasn't so interesting, I'd turn the light of the l-l-lamp on the scene. But time presses."

To all of this, the Mexican made no reply, but sat shivering as if stricken with a sudden chill.

"I'm g-going to ask you a few questions, and if you don't answer them as p-promptly as I think you ought to, I'll b-bore a good-sized hole through your worthless c-carcass. You didn't c-come here without being s-sent?"

"Si, senor!" the Mexican meekly replied.

"Don't 's-si senor' me!" Can you talk Am-American?"

"Si, senor," the answer came again.

"That's b-better. Now, who sent you here?"

"Si, senor," repeated the cringing Mexican.

"If you answer me in that f-fool way again, I'll surely h-have to put a hole through you! Who sent you here?"

The question was almost thundered; and the startled Mexican crouched and cringed under the sound, but made no reply.

"You can't understand, or you w-won't, which is the s-same thing. I know you can t-talk, and I'm going to m-make you. You s-see this p-pistol? It c-c-carries a ball like a musket, and its l-loaded. I'm going to c-c-count three; and if you d-d-don't tell me, then, who sent you h-here, I'll pull the t-trigger. You tried to k-kill me, and if I w-wipe you out, it will only be an evening of the score."

There was the ring of deadly determination in his voice, and the Mexican's quaking convinced him that the fellow understood well enough.

"So here goes: One, two—"

He lingered a little as if hesitating to pronounce the word "three," and the Mexican, shaking in every limb, called out shrilly:

"Don't! Don't! Please don't!"

"I thought you'd find your t-tongue! Now, the n-name of the fellow who sent you here to k-kill me?"

"Tallabee, Mr. Tallabee!"

"And what did he p-promise you for the j-job?"

"A hundred dollar."

"And J-Jason Deel was to furnish the money! I k-know that, and I know that he had too m-much sense to show his hand in the g-game, too."

"Did any one else s-sp-speak to you except T-Tallabee?"

The Mexican gave his head a negative shake.

Many more questions the sport put to him, but without obtaining any further information. The villain had seen no one but Tallabee, and could connect no one else with the attempted crime; and having satisfied himself of this, the sport gave the rascal a stern warning and let him go.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STARTLING DISCLOSURE.

"I've made the biggest find of the season, and you'll say so, when I tell you of it!"

Clarkson Jinks, enthusiastic and smiling, came into the Hummer's room with a quick stride, making the declaration as he entered.

Stuttering Sam was with the Hummer in the room.

"Don't be so miserly as to keep the good news all to yourself," the Hummer protested, when Clarkson had halted to note the effect of his words.

"Jason Deel has sold the Cenci estate!"

The Hummer and the sport could not have seemed more dumfounded had a bomb exploded beneath their feet.

"What do you think of it?" and Clarkson slipped into a seat and pulled at his sandy mustache as he waited for his friends to recover their equanimity.

As neither made reply, he continued:

"Oh, it's so; and you needn't stare at me as if you'd taken leave of your seven senses! I'm a delver in musty tomes and legal records, and have followed it so long that I can't keep away from the thing. I was running through the books in the register's office this morning, just for amusement, and not expecting to find anything, when I ran onto this."

"T-tell us about it," the sport requested.

"Who was the p-purchaser?"

"I thought you'd be able to guess that. It's Father Petrie. The church and the Mission are the beneficiaries, and Petrie holds the land merely for their use."

"Of course it's a fraud," the Hummer asserted. "The very biggest kind of a fraud!"

"Of course," Jinks assented, "but the transfer may make us a lot of trouble, all the same. Deel sees that the way things are going, Cenci's bound to beat him in the end, and has taken this way to head him off. You know he has always pretended to be a great friend of the Church, and has given liberally to it and to Father Petrie, not because he wanted to, but because he felt he must."

"This reputation for generosity in that line may stand him in good stead, now. I called the attention of the register to the record of the transfer and asked him what he thought of it; and he said he had heard that Deel had always been liberal to the Church, and did not seem much surprised at the size of the gift. Deel's got a good many people around here to thinking that he's a double-dyed millionaire."

"He's a double-d-d-dyed villain!" the sport asserted.

"But will the thing hold?" the Hummer queried. "Surely that's a transparent fraud on the face of it! It's a mere blind, and done to beat Cenci. What was the consideration?"

"Nothing in dollars; but merely love of the Church and affection for the reverend father."

"He loves the Church just as the devil loves holy water!" and Hartsook's blue eyes flashed. "I'm pretty certain that the deed won't stand. If we can prove that the estate was not Deel's but Cenci's, it seems to me that will settle it. A man can't give away what does not belong to him, any more than a thief can make a good bill of sale for the horse he has stolen. But I'm no lawyer!"

"No, you're the Hummer from Hummingbird, and that's something better!" and Jinks smiled at his own smartness.

"We've got a lawyer on our d-detective force," said the sport. "Wh-what's the matter with Slocum? Let's call on him."

The advice seemed so good that it was instantly acted on.

The great Slocum had been full of business in these latter days, for the duties incidental to his candidacy pressed him hard. He had made a canvass of his district, for he was credited with being a power on the stump, and had but lately returned to Santa Fe, and was now engaged in looking after his political fences in that city.

He was feeling jubilant over his prospects, for he had been received with ovations in many places, and his chances were most flattering.

He wheeled about in his arm-chair as the trio entered, and in his big, hoarse voice bade them welcome.

"Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen! Glad to see you! I am, indeed!" and he mopped his streaming brow with a flaming handkerchief that was scarcely redder than his own heated face. "Blistering weather we're having! In a double sense, this has been the hottest campaign I was ever engaged in."

He poked the handkerchief into his trousers pocket, and his hand in after it, and then, leaning back in his chair, thrust out his protuberant abdomen in a way that was comically characteristic of the man.

Hartsook, as spokesman for the party, introduced the subject that had brought them there.

The fat hand came out of the pocket with a flourish.

"I am glad of it, gentlemen. You couldn't have told me anything that would have pleased me better."

The three stared, wondering what Slocum meant, yet sure that he had not transferred his allegiance.

"It's all right, gentlemen," with a crafty wink. "I'll be a member of the Legislature, next week; and when I get there, I'll put a fly into Father Petrie's ointment. The old scamp has done his best against me, and so have all the fellows he has under his control. I'll be glad of a chance to even things."

"But, under the circumstances I have mentioned, could Petrie hold the land against Cenci?" the Hummer asked.

"That's a legal question, gentlemen, and just now, I don't know anything but politics. But, whether he can or whether he can't is not of much moment, now. I shall fight him along another line. Just leave it to me, gentlemen! Just leave it to me!"

Slocum rubbed his pudgy hands together, and fairly reveled in some mysterious vision of revenge.

"I'm glad Deel done that. It's a big thing. Leave it to me, will you? Leave it to me!"

He bobbed his head and winked again, and laughed so immoderately that he seemed in danger of choking himself to death. But of what he intended to do they could get no hint. And when they left, they scarcely knew whether to be pleased or angry at the reception accorded them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MAIDEN DISTRESSED.

"I WISH to speak with you!"

"The gladiator, turning, saw at his elbow the slight form and pale face of Juanita Concha."

Garcia had come to the Mission for an interview with Father Manzanitini, as Manzanitini had agreed to use his influence in securing the bull-fighter's re-instatement. When Petrie brought about the gladiator's downfall, he did so by use of money and by false assertions.

The populace was not so fickle as Petrie and Deel had thought, and still clung with considerable loyalty to their old favorite. Of course, another *espada*, and a rival, had taken Garcia's place, but he had not proved himself the fighter that Garcia had time and again shown himself to be; and this fact had given the gladiator great hope, and urged him on in the effort to regain his old place.

Manzanitini was a mild-mannered man, pure and noble, and an upright priest; yet notwithstanding this, he was fond of the Mexican pastime of bull-fighting, and did not look with disfavor on Garcia's calling. He had done, and was doing, all he could, with excellent chances that his work would be crowned with success.

So he had told the gladiator, and the latter had turned with a lighter heart to leave the place; when he was approached and spoken to by Juanita Concha, in the language used above.

"What is it, my little one?" said the big bull-fighter, looking into the upturned face.

"Just a few words with you please!"

She led the way into one of the wards of the hospital, the bull-fighter following, wondering what this could mean, for he saw by her face that she was much distressed.

When they were safely within the ward, she placed a chair for him and sat herself down on the white cot.

"You are a worthy man, Garcia, and a lover of our Holy Church! Therefore, I have been so bold as to come to you. You will not think me bold, though, I am sure?"

She was trembling; and the gladiator did what he could to soothe her and remove her agitation.

"I should never think that of you, Juanita. I know you too well. You are pale and thin. The work here is too hard for you. You are wearing your life out with night-watching and anxiety for these poor sick souls."

"It is not that," she said, "I am strong; much stronger than you think. But my mind is not at rest."

"It is Father Petrie who distresses you, is it not?"

"Ay, it is Father Petrie."

"I knew it, my wee one. No one else could have the heart to treat you ill. But tell me what it is. What has he done?"

"You know I have been reared for the Sisterhood," she began. "Since I was first brought here, I have been consecrated to that; and now, Father Petrie insists that the time has come for me to take orders."

"And you would not?" Garcia questioned, taking one of her little hands in his.

"I am a wicked girl; oh, so wicked! I fear I am in the power of the Evil One. How I have prayed to be directed aright. I feel that I ought to be happy and blessed in the work of the Sisterhood; and yet the very thought of it is distasteful to me. Oh, my heart is in a terrible state!"

She spoke to the gladiator as she would have spoken to her own father, and he regarded her with a feeling that was as fatherly as if she had been his own child. Yet Garcia was not an old man, being only in the prime of his magnificent manhood. He was really but little older than Stuttering Sam or the Hummer from Hummingbird.

"You are so strong, and I am so weak that I cannot help coming to you with my troubles."

"Speak on, little one!" in a voice that was as inviting and low as a woman's.

"I think it must be because I am to leave here, that I feel so badly about it," Juanita continued, thus encouraged.

"Why are you to leave here?" the bull-fighter questioned, in a tone of surprise.

"Father Petrie tells me that there is work for

me in the town of San Rafael, and that I am to go there."

"And that is in Mexico?"

"It is."

"Speak on," he said, "I would hear all."

"Perhaps I should not be so afraid of Father Petrie, Garcia, but I had a vision. Oh! it was a most sweet and tender vision. It came to me in my room at night, after I had been praying for guidance."

"I do not remember my mother," looking at him so wistfully and trustfully, "but she came to me in that vision. It seems to me that I was awake, for I do not recall having fallen asleep, neither the waking. She was an angel, my mother who came to me, and the Mother of God was with her. And their faces were like the sun when it sets over the mountains, so bright and dazzling."

Her own face as she looked up into the sympathetic eyes of the gladiator seemed transfigured and glorified by a light that was not of earth.

"And she spoke to me in a voice that sounded like the tinkle of silver bells or the chant of the Ave Maria sung by heavenly lips; and she warned me, Garcia, warned me against Father Petrie!"

So touching were her words and manner that even the stern eyes of the bull-fighter became suffused with tears.

"I feel that this was not a mere idle dream, but was a heaven-sent vision. Such visions do come to people! They came to St. Peter, to St. Joseph, and to blessed men and women in all ages. And since I have seen this, I've been so afraid of Father Petrie; and the thoughts of the work he is planning for me have become more distasteful than ever."

Manuel Garcia saw into the pure mind of Juanita Concha and comprehended her feelings far better than she did herself. In his opinion, the vision was heaven-sent; and knowing Father Petrie as he did, he could not question the truthfulness of the angelic warning.

He felt that the real cause of her changed feelings was her love for the sport. This love she had fought down, thinking to crush it out of existence, and even fancied at times that she had done so; but it remained, and its presence and growth had altered her whole outlook on the world.

The gladiator understood this, even though Juanita Concha did not. This was, he told himself, which had turned her heart away from the work of the Church for which she had been trained, and toward which she had heretofore looked with pleasure.

Garcia was a conscientious man, and in his way a sincerely devout one; and his mind was deeply troubled, as he thought of all this. The girl had come to him for advice and instruction. What should he do?

"There is a feeling of love in that little heart for the stuttering sport, is there not?" he questioned.

Her face flushed a little as she returned his anxious glance.

"I have been telling myself there is not, yet I sometimes fear I have been telling myself falsely. I am so weak, Garcia! I would that I had never seen that man; and yet he saved me from the horns of the bull. I am weak, and I am wicked! It has been my desire, and I have prayed, that I might think of him only as a brother or a father, or as a good, kind man who had saved my life."

"You do not answer me straightly. Yet I cannot say that I blame you. These things come and no one can hinder; and I have been led to believe, Juanita, that they are heaven-directed."

"Stuttering Sam is a good man, a most excellent man! He has his faults, and so have we all. And he is a brave man, and I love brave men! What an *espada* he would have made, if he had been early trained to it! And his courage has been used for the right. If I were a woman, I could not help loving such a man!"

"But they tell me he is bad, wicked," was Juanita's tremulous answer, as she hung her head.

"And who is it that tells these things?"

"Father Petrie!"

"Ay, Father Petrie! I knew as much. I much fear me, Juanita, he is a craven priest!" lowering his voice and looking about as if afraid he might be overheard.

"It is scarcely lawful and just to cast words of blame on a member of the holy priesthood. Yet one cannot control his thoughts, nor doubt what he himself has seen and heard. If Father Manzantini had said those things! Ah, that would be different!"

"They tell me he is a gambler and a swindler, and that he filches from men their hard earnings."

"Father Petrie tells these things? It may have been so in the past; but I have reason to think it is so no longer. And, Juanita," looking straight into her eyes, "it is his love for you which has wrought the change. He was always a brave man, and he has grown to be an honorable one. In this I know whereof I speak, for I have watched him closely."

The face of the girl grew radiant as she listened to these words of praise. If Garcia, who was so wise and good, believed this of the sport, then

surely the latter was not the bold, bad man he had been painted.

"Oh, I grow confused when I think of it all!" she panted, pressing a hand to her breast.

"But," and she checked herself, "I must not think of this man in that way. I really must not!"

"Think of him as a good, kind friend," said Garcia, tenderly. "There can be no harm in that. And now, about the Sisterhood and the work at San Rafael. I have been asking myself what you should do. It is a difficult question. I am not a man of thought, but rather a man of action and deeds."

He bowed his head upon his hands and gave himself up to reflection.

Juanita watched him closely, almost fearing to breathe, wondering if his decision would accord with the wishes of her heart. She feared it would not, yet resolved to act on it, whatever it might be.

"Juanita," he said, looking up, "I try to be a devout man and a good Catholic. This is a sore puzzle to me, and I would that it had not been laid on my shoulders, which in other ways are strong enough, but in this are weak."

"Heaven help me to speak aright!" clasping his hands as if uttering a prayer. "I will speak aright, for surely in such a case, one cannot go wrong! I should not take orders, as yet; neither should I go to the town of San Rafael. Stay where you are, and as you are, for the present. If Father Petrie urges you, appeal to Manzantini. He is a good man and a true friend. And remain firm in this until I can duly consider the matter and see you again."

Having uttered this conclusion, he arose to go, leaving her seated on the cot, looking cheerfully at him.

"Keep a stout heart, my daughter; and mayhap, when I return, matters will be more favorable."

Then he passed from the ward and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE HUMMER'S DOUBLE.

AFTER the attempt on the life of Stuttering Sam by the Mexican, Hartsook changed from his apartments and occupied the room above the Golconda with the sport. This movement was taken as a measure of precaution, for the perils about each were thickening hourly.

Time and again had Jason Deel shown the vindictiveness of his nature, and as he was being driven more and more into a corner by the activities of the men combined against him, he was becoming more and more desperate.

They could not doubt that Deel had been the instigating cause of the attempt on the life of the sport, and if he descended once to the employment of a hired assassin, he would be likely to do so again. Those who had most to fear from him had been very guarded of late in their movements, not knowing from what quarter the expected blows might fall.

The Hummer and the sport were much together now; and as they were sitting, late one night, in the little room above the Golconda, their attention was drawn to a noise just across the hallway.

The door of the room was partly ajar; and there was a faint moonlight which struggled into the hall and enabled them to see, though not clearly.

Neither spoke but sat staring in the direction of the sound. There was a room almost opposite, and the noise seemed to come from within this. There would have been nothing strange in the circumstance, if they had not seen the occupant of the room go down-stairs a few moments before, and had no recollection of his returning.

As they looked, they saw the door slowly open and a man step quietly through the doorway. He had in his hand some articles of clothing, and his furtive, nervous manner showed that he had been engaged in an act of burglary.

The strange thing of it all however, and a thing that kept them quiet with very astonishment, was that the fellow seemed to be the exact counterfeit of the Hummer from Hummingbird.

He was of slight stature, and was dressed just as the Hummer usually dressed. There was on his head a cuckoo-winged hat, and long blonde hair fell about his shoulders. They had not a good view of his face, but its partial revelation showed that it resembled the Hummer's, for even in the limited light, they could see the tawny mustache and white forehead.

Stuttering Sam stared as if his eyes would start from their sockets. Had he not known that the Hummer was seated by his side, he would have been sure that this burglarious individual was none other than his friend.

As the man took another step and turned to go toward the stairway, the spell which had held them was broken.

With incoherent exclamations, they leaped to their feet; and the rascal hearing these, broke into a run.

He was quick-footed and was down the stairway almost before they succeeded in gaining the hall.

He did not go directly through the gambling-room, but took a side-passage which opened

from it; and he was for a moment visible, as he sped in the direction of the street.

As it chanced, the occupant of the room and owner of the stolen clothing was standing in the door looking on this side-passage; and had a fairly good view of the supposed Hummer as he slipped by with the clothing on his arm. He recognized the garments, and called, using Hartsook's name, asking him the meaning of this, for he had never regarded the Hummer as a thief.

Instead of replying, the man gave a startled cry at being thus discovered, and fled the faster.

The owner of the clothing uttered a shout to draw after him the occupants of the gaming-room, and started in pursuit; and a number of the gamblers poured into the street as the Hummer and the sport came leaping down the stairway.

Thus it chanced, that they saw the supposed Hummer in front of them, and did not see the real Hummer who followed in their wake.

The thief disappeared around a corner, and when they had advanced to that point, and could not discover where he had betaken himself, they turned back toward the Golconda, although a few kept up a useless search.

When they turned back they beheld, to their astonishment, Hartsook advancing toward them with the stuttering sport.

"What has become of the se-scoundrel?" Sam questioned, almost breathless from his run.

The men drew together and stared coldly at the pair.

"It couldn't have been Hartsook!" said one of them, more generous than the others, as he advanced. "I always had faith in the Hummer. It hasn't been a minute since the other fellow went around the corner; and if it had been our friend here, he couldn't have got back so soon."

Some of the others imitated this action, but many still held themselves aloof, and muttered together as they passed on into the gaming-room.

"There's an ugly look about the thing," Hartsook confessed. "I know it's a put-up job to injure me, but a good many men won't see it that way."

Not all the men who haunted the Golconda were friendly to the Hummer and the sport, and these eagerly seized upon the suspicious circumstance, and proceeded to dilate on it, and magnify it, to the great injury of Hartsook's reputation.

The Hummer and the sport consulted a little while with those inclined to be friendly to them; and coming to the conclusion that the best way to down all suspicion would be to produce this double of the Hummer, they re-commenced the search.

All their efforts were utterly futile; and they were forced to return to the Golconda and face as well as they could the distrust which had been created.

The robbed man had made an examination of his room, and discovered what articles were missing. He was inclined to be especially taciturn and bitter. They found John Laclede, the keeper of the Golconda, in a similar frame of mind, for it was a reproach to him to have such burglaries committed in the house.

"I assert on my honor as a man, that I had no hand in this!" the Hummer declared, going up to the occupant of the room, who was conversing with Laclede. "And to prove to you that I had not, I stand ready to pay you for the missing articles. Just name their value, and you shall have the money."

"I'm not making any charges," the fellow growled, surlily. "I reckon sixty dollars would about cover the bill, though."

He believed the Hummer the guilty party; and thought that, having been discovered in his thieving, he was endeavoring in this way to make amends, and ward off suspicion; and that if he had not been seen, he would have shuffled off with the articles fast enough.

Nevertheless, he took the money, and then the Hummer and the sport explained what they knew of the affair; and this explanation they repeated to those in the gaming-room.

"That's the worst blow Deel has struck us, yet," Hartsook asserted, when he and the sport had returned to their room. "He is a man full of surprises, and it will hurt us more than anything he has yet done."

"Wh-who could it have been, do you r-reckon?" and Stuttering Sam stared at the wall in a blank way. "If I didn't know better, H-Hartsook, I'd be w-willing to go into any court-room to-morrow morning and-and swear it was you."

"That's just it! I'm not a dude, but I'm fond enough of looking into a glass to know my features when I see them. And that fellow looked enough like me to be my twin brother."

"But I've never seen a man in t-town who did l-look like you!"

"I presume not; but this fellow was 'made-up' just as actors 'make-up' for the stage. He is about my build and height; and the rest was easy enough. Clothes such as I wear are not hard to obtain. The hat with the cuckoo wings on it wouldn't be difficult to rig. The hair was false, of course, and so was the mus-

tache; and as for complexion, if his wasn't the exact color, he could touch it up a little with some preparation.

"I can see through the thing easy enough; but the trouble will be to make others see through it. The fellow came here and was purposely discovered by those down-stairs, with the clothing in his hands. He is one of Deel's tools, I know; and the whole thing was planned by Deel; and I must give the fellow credit for his shrewdness, if for nothing else. But it's going to hurt me, and hurt me bad. I wouldn't have had it happen for big money!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SECOND SENSATION.

THERE had been two or three stage robberies in the vicinity of Santa Fe, recently; which had been provocative of much talk and excitement; but none had occurred within a week, and when the stuttering sport mounted the Socorro mail stage, the chance that it would be attacked seemed the most unlikely thing in the world.

Stuttering Sam had spent the day at his mine; for the new work he was putting on it had begun to develop silver in promising quantities. He had come down in the early morning and remained until some time after nightfall. Then, as the belated mail stage hove in sight, he chose that means of getting into town instead of walking.

The distance was not great; and, as has been said, the likelihood that there would be an attempted mail robbery was a thing not dreamed of by the passengers.

There were only two of them in addition to the sport, a bearded miner from the Arizona silver country, loaded down with firearms, and a beardless youth who was new to the ways of the West.

"It's been a tewific wide, don't you know? The vewy worst expewience I evah had. The mountains ah grand, and all that, but to wile oveh them in a wattling old stage-coach quite takes all the womance out of the thing."

"That younker has been afeard fer his life ever sence we started frum Socor!" the miner grinned, directing his remarks also to Stuttering Sam. "His hair's been a-standin' on end, half of the time. And road-agents! w'y, he's seen one in every bush."

Stuttering Sam laughed heartily at the sally, but the laugh was quickly stilled by the ominous call of "Throw up your hands!"

As if conjured up by the miner's words, a man had stepped from the shadow of a rock beside the trail, and with rifle leveled on the driver had shouted the order.

The Jehu had had such experiences before, and promptly pulled in on the reins.

The sport gave a start, as his eyes fell on the road-agent.

It was the same man who had personated the Hummer and entered the room at the Golconda. There was the same clothing, the same disguises. The blonde mane and cuckoo wings could be seen distinctly, though the man's face, owing to the flickering shadows, was not plainly revealed as before.

There was an attempt at imitating the voice of the Hummer, which might have fooled ears less familiar with the real voice than were the ears of the sport.

"Throw up your hands!" came the command again, and the moonlight scintillated on the shining rifle-barrel in a way to emphasize the words.

This second command was no sooner uttered, however, than the sport drew his revolver and fired a shot at the rascal through the window of the stage.

The shot was defiantly returned, and the heavy ball from the rifle splintered the wood dangerously near the sport's head.

"Oh, don't! Pwease don't!" implored the frightened dude. "He'll muhdeh evewy one of us!"

He reached up and caught the sport by the coat and clung to him in an appealing and most aggravating way.

"Shet yer yawp!" snarled the miner, who was struggling to get out one of his own weapons. "Ye ain't got as much sence as a snake-eatin' Piute!"

"Oh, don't shoot any more, mister!" the youth pleaded; like one bereft of his senses, he clung the more stoutly; and would not relinquish his hold until Stuttering Sam forcibly compelled him to.

Again the sport fired through the window, and again a shot from the rifle plowed through the coach.

"Git down on the floor an' eat dirt!" the miner cried, spurning the dude with his foot. "You need a little sand in your gizzard, an' thet'll be a chance fer ye to lick it up by the mouthfuls. Git down there, ye fool! and the bullets won't be so lib'le to ketch ye!"

He fairly shoved the dude into a corner of the coach; and then, having got out one of his own revolvers, sent a shot in the direction of the threatening road-agent.

The events recorded required scarcely a minute for their action.

The stage-driver had no more of a liking

for lead than had the young man from the East; and at the first fire, he had thrown himself from the box and was now cowering in terror on the ground.

With the assistance of the miner, the sport sent such a shower of balls, that the fellow concluded that discretion was the better part of valor, and made off.

The horses, made restive by the first shot, were unable to stand the fusillade, and broke into a gallop before the retreating road-agent had fairly disappeared. The recreant driver, when he had leaped to the ground, had left the reins lying loose on the box, and these became tangled about their feet and added to their terror.

They had veered slightly from the trail, too, and almost at the first rush the wheels of the vehicle struck a rock which threw it high into the air, piling the miner and Stuttering Sam in a heap on top of the shivering dude.

"Tigers an' catymounts! Hain't ye e't enough sand, yit?" roared the miner, as he scrambled to his feet. "I'd be a man er a mouse; an' ef I couldn't be either, I'd crawl into a hole in the ground an' pull the hole in after me!"

Every moment was adding to the terror of the stampeding horses, and they were now flying along the trail at breakneck speed. There could be only one result to this mad race. The stage would soon be wrecked, and the occupants killed or seriously injured.

As for the driver, he had been left far behind to keep company with the routed road-agent.

"This will n-never do," said the sport, clinging to the side of the coach for support. "Those h-horses must be stopped!"

He was not the one to ask another to take the post of danger, but throwing open the stage-door, he reached up and grasped the guard-rail that ran around the vehicle's deck; and in spite of the terrible bounds it was making, strove to draw himself up.

The first and second efforts were failures, for the lurching of the stage served to throw him back and overcome his endeavors; but at the third, he succeeded in getting a better hold, and with much difficulty drew himself to the top. Then he worked his way slowly and painfully to the driver's box, from which he descended to the tongue of the coach.

The horses were racing wildly, as if determined to run themselves to death in the shortest possible time, and the coach as it now and then struck a rock, was thrown bodily into the air.

Notwithstanding this, the sport managed to make his way out on the pole, and succeeded in getting astride of the near wheel-horse. Then with the bridle of the animal, he strove to check their speed, and to gain possession of the trailing lines.

To sit the horse thus, without a saddle, was not the easiest thing in the world, and it was many minutes before he could get control of the reins of the lead team; but he did so at last, and with much exertion drew the horses down into a walk.

They were thoroughly blown, and still much excited and nervous; and to soothe them, he brought them to a halt and got down from the box.

At this, the miner came out to congratulate him, and after him crawled the crestfallen dude.

"I never see a job of the kind done up nicer!" the miner commented, as he stroked the neck of the nearest animal. "It were jes' fine; it were so!"

The dude had no words to offer, all the animation having been crushed out of him by the events of the past few minutes.

"Now, see here, p-pards," exclaimed the sport, when the horses had been quieted and they were about ready to recommence the journey. "I've a f-favor to ask of both of you."

"Spit it out!" said the miner, as he took a big chew of tobacco to quiet his overstrained nerves. "Whate'er I can do fer a man like you, I'll do gladly."

"I'm pleased to h-hear it. You noticed the c-cut of that road-agent's j-jib, I suppose?"

"I couldn't fobget it!" declared the youth, who was regaining his courage. "That twemendous big wifle and those wings were enough to fwighten any one."

"Skeered you, anyhow!" giving him a contemptuous glance. "Ef I wuz you, I'd keep my mouth shet about the whole biz, but I'll bet a gol' slug that ye ain't safe in Santa Fe twenty minutes tell you'll be braggin' like all git-out how you run the fellow off b'ar-handed."

The swelling youth collapsed under the miner's scornful words.

"I w-wanted to know if you n-noticed the looks of the fellow, and for a reason that you may think very str-strange. I've a-a p-partner in Santa Fe who l-looks exactly like that r-rascal. His name is H-Hartsook, but he's generally called the Hummer from H-Hummingbird."

Both the miner and the dude stared at this revelation.

"I don't know wh-who the fellow is that tried to play the road-agent b-business to-night, but he's g-got it in for my p-pard, and is trying to do h-him up by dressing j-just like he does and c-committing various crimes."

"You s-s-see the point? No doubt he's one of the enemies of my p-partner, and thinks to r-ruin his good name in that way."

"Does your pabtnr weah wings on his hat?" the dude asked superciliously.

"He does, young m-man, and he's w-worn them ever sence he c-came to Santa Fe."

"What do you want us to say about the biz?" the miner questioned, the whole thing appearing to be muddled in his mind. "How are we to swear who he wuz er who he wuzn't?"

"That's wh-what I want to make clear, if I can. You'll a-agree with me, now, that it ain't at all likely that I'd sh-sh-shoot that way at my own partner? Neither would he shoot back at me."

"But you got on the stage just a shoht time befoh," the officious dude reminded. "He might not have known you wehe in the the concealn, don't you know?"

It was a thought which had not come to the sport.

"Th-that's very true," he confessed, "but if he didn't know I was in th-there, I would know him, t-taking it for granted that he was my partner; and I w-wouldn't try to shoot him!"

He felt even then that his words could not be sufficiently convincing. He had fired at the man in the cuckoo-winged hat, it is true, but who could say he had not aimed his balls wildly?

The additional suggestion came to him that if the road-agent had really been Hartsook, and he his partner, the opportunity for robbing the stage would have been of the best, for he, within the vehicle, could have held the passengers with drawn weapons, while the road-agent outside could have gone through the valuables.

He made the most of this thought, dilating on it from every point of view; but when the journey had recommenced, and they swung into the streets of Santa Fe, he had a feeling that his efforts had not been wholly successful.

Truly, this last scheme of Deel's was the most dangerous one he had concocted.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HUMMER GOES TO PRISON.

THE encouraging words of the gladiator were a comfort to Juanita Concha, and upheld her through the weary, dragging days. They were graven on her heart; and before retiring, every night, she prayed for Heaven's blessing on the kind *espada*.

But once since had Father Petrie approached her on the subject of her removal to San Rafael; and then she had broken down and cried so bitterly, that he had been forced to go away without saying the words he had desired to say.

All these things, Juanita Concha was thinking of, as she sat in the dusk of a pleasant summer evening, looking at the fading daylight as it shone on the high buildings and towers of the city which were visible beyond the Mission walls.

It was a pleasure to sit there with her own thoughts; and it is not to be wondered at, if the many-hued dreams which come to girls of her age should have come to her as she looked toward the sunset-bars, and out into the unknown world which lay beyond the misty mountains.

As she sat thus, a light footfall sounded on the sandy walk beside her, and she turned to see—the Hummer from Hummingbird! At least she supposed it to be he.

In the old days, when he had visited the Mission for the purpose of searching the San Muerto records, she had seen him frequently, and so was familiar with his appearance.

"You are here," he said, in a voice which seemed strained and hoarse, and not the voice she remembered as belonging to the Hummer. "I'm glad of it."

She arose as if about to retreat, but he detained her by an imperative wave of the hand.

"Sit down," he said. "I will not harm you."

She sunk into the seat, almost involuntarily, feeling powerless to fly; and as she did so, she got a good view of his face, as good a view as was possible in the faint light. It struck her as being ghastly and unnatural, as unnatural as was the voice. Instead of having the white, healthy look, characteristic of Hartsook, the face had a pallid, deathly hue, such as might be produced by some complexion powder. Then, the hair did not appear so soft and wavy, and the mustache was slightly twisted awry.

Her eyes dilated with horror, as she noted these things and wondered what they meant.

"I come from the sport, Stuttering Sam," the man explained, endeavoring to sink his voice to a gentler tone.

In that instant she knew, or rather felt, that the fellow was an impostor; and, thrilled through with a nameless fear, struggled to her feet and gave utterance to an ear-piercing scream.

"Sit down and don't be a fool!" he roughly ordered, glancing about apprehensively. "I

tell you I won't hurt you. I have a message to deliver, nothing more."

His rough words only increased her fright and she screamed again and again.

Such screams could not go unnoticed; and sounds of footsteps were heard within the building.

"You're a little fool!" he snarled, looking again around, and then starting off. "I tell you I came from Stuttering Sam!"

Father Petrie had appeared in the nearest doorway, and the last words were spoken so loud that they could be overheard by the priest.

Juanita was almost swooning from excess of terror; and the appearance of Father Petrie, and the knowledge that he had heard those words was not calculated to give her added strength.

Father Manzantini had also come into view by this time, and with a number of others, gave chase, the fellow running swiftly toward the gate.

Manzantini shouted to the keeper to close the gate; but the latter misunderstanding him, ran out of his little house in the direction of the outcry. When he understood what was desired, he wheeled and ran toward the gate, but he was too late to accomplish Manzantini's wish, for the false Hummer was almost upon him as he turned.

The gate-keeper, seeing that he could not reach the gate, rushed upon the intruder and attempted to hold him by claspings him about the legs.

With a vicious snarl, such as might be uttered by a wild beast brought to bay or impeded in its flight, the scoundrel drew a knife and struck the gate-keeper down.

The struggle with the gate-keeper detained the rascal but for a short time; and now, released by the stroke of the knife, he ran through the gate and quickly disappeared.

Father Manzantini and the others lifted the wounded gate-keeper tenderly and bore him to the hospital. The man was badly hurt, the knife-blade having penetrated the shoulder and ranged downward toward the lungs. He was insensible at first, but under the ministrations of the priests and others, returned soon after to consciousness; and Manzantini, after having made a careful examination of the injury, stated that with proper care and good luck the gate-keeper would recover.

Juanita Concha had been a horrified witness of the affair, and a feeling rested upon her that in some way she was responsible for it all; and when Father Petrie proceeded to heap reproaches upon her because of the surreptitious visits of the false Hummer, her anguish of mind became almost unendurable.

"It was not Mr. Hartsook," she asserted, struggling with bold words to revive her sinking courage.

"Ah, you wicked girl!" shaking his fat forefinger at her reprovingly. "If it was not he, who was it? You have disgraced yourself, Juanita, and brought dishonor upon the Holy Church."

"Do not chide me," she implored. "Really, truly, I am not the guilty thing you seem to think me! I knew not the man was here until he spoke to me. Indeed, Father Petrie, that is the truth! It was not Mr. Hartsook, and when he continued to talk to me, I became frightened and screamed out."

A cynical sneer came to the fat face.

"But when you thought it was this Hummer, as he foolishly calls himself, you didn't scream, but listened to his words? It was only when you believed him to be another, that you gave the alarm! Is it not so, Juanita? I shall have to report the particulars of this to the Sister Superior."

"You do me injustice, Father Petrie!" the tears standing in her eyes. "You do, truly!"

"No doubt this Hummer has been here before; and he spoke to you of Stuttering Sam, did he not?" and his tones were withering. "Ah, you vain girl, you false girl! You have dared to love this man, this gambler, this rascal! The sooner you are sent to the work in San Rafael, the better it will be for you!"

With these bitter and ominous words, he turned away, leaving the girl wild-eyed and panting, and a prey to the keenest fears.

The search beyond the walls for the false Hummer resulted in nothing, because of the quick coming of night; but the news of his visit and the events growing out of it speedily reached Hartsook and Stuttering Sam at the Golconda. The one bearing the news was friendly to the Hummer, and accompanied his information with the suggestion that it would not be a bad idea for the Hummer to lay low for a few days, as a warrant for his arrest might issue on account of the stabbing of the gate-keeper.

Hartsook was not a man to harbor such a thought for an instant; but this new exploit of his double sorely troubled him. He and the sport had just been speaking of the double's attempt on the stage coach.

"Things are getting mighty r-r-rocky," Stuttering Sam commented, when the informant had taken his departure. "We've got to down this fellow, or he'll d-down us!"

"My dear Sam, what are we to do?" and the

Hummer looked quizzically at his bewinged hat. "I guess I'll have to throw these cuckoo wings into the fire and get a barber to run his glittering shears through my golden auburn locks. Heretofore, they have been my banner of victory, my white plume of Navarre. But now they seem leading me into the abyss of defeat. You say we must do something. It's pretty hard to fight a shadowy substance that seems to go and come like the dust of Santa Fe. What and where shall we strike?"

Stuttering Sam looked thoughtfully down his nose. He had no reply.

"I'll tell you what," and the Hummer straightened up and replaced the hat on his head. "There's one way we might trap the fellow; lead him into a tangled web that should tie him up and release me from under this cloud of suspicion. I feel that I am actually becoming famous. Wherever I go, the eyes of the people follow me, as they used to follow the gladiator, and now follow the great Slocum."

"S-saw it off!" Sam interjected. "What's your idea?"

The Hummer smiled good-naturedly at his friend's reproval.

"My idea is as simple as it is beautiful. My dear Sam, it's a promising thought. It will run more ounces of silver to the ton than your mine ever will. I'll go to jail!"

The sport stared, as if thinking the Hummer was taking leave of his senses.

"Oh, I'm in deadly earnest! If I go quietly to the jailer and ask him to lock me up, and explain why, he'll do it, especially if I pay for my board. No one but you and I, and our intimate friends, and the jailer of course, need know a thing about it. If we keep the thing as shady as we ought to, this precious double of mine will go right along with his playful humor, and so will run his head into a trap. The biggest fool on earth will be bound to see that if I was in jail, I couldn't be outside, too, cutting these delightful capers; and we can bring in the evidence of the jailer to show that I was in there at the time."

The scheme promised so well, and was altogether so alluring that it was put into immediate effect; and that night, the Hummer from Hummingbird reposed on a little jail-cell inside the dreary walls of the prison, and none knew of it save those who should know.

CHAPTER XXV.

SLOCUM AS A LEGISLATOR.

The Hon. Sucker Slocum had not allowed the grass to grow under his feet from the moment of the announcement of his candidacy; and when the long-looked-for day, the great day, the day of the election came around, he found his name inscribed on the rolls of honor. He was elected, his course had been vindicated, and no prouder or happier mortal strode with ponderous steps this mundane planet.

The Legislature convened soon after, and Slocum took his seat within the sacred precincts allotted to members of that honorable body with a swelling dignity which greatly became him.

Amid the joys of this blissful period, the Hon. Sucker did not forget his late enemies, neither was he unmindful of the friends who had so manfully stood by him and through whose influence and labors he was elevated to this exalted station. The names of Petrie and Deel were written indelibly on the book of his hate; and, to use a current phrase, he "had it in for them."

It was a memorable session, and among the first bills introduced was one by Slocum, and its character fairly took away the breath of the members, and thrilled the city with a new excitement. It was as audacious as it was original and unexpected.

Slocum had given intimation to his friends of what he intended to do; and when he arose in his seat, and with a dignified flourish held up the bill he had drafted, his expectant gaze fell on the faces of the stuttering sport, Jones Simpson and his daughter Nevada, Cerro Cenci, Garcia, and a host of others too numerous to mention.

"I have here," he said, swelling pompously, "a bill which I offer, and which, after it has been read by the clerk, I wish to make a few remarks on before it goes to the committee."

He then read the title of the bill:

"An Act Providing for the Confiscation of Certain Property Conveyed to the Catholic Church Within the Territory of New Mexico."

There was instantly a thought in the mind of every one that the proposed act was a most silly thing, for the reason that there was no warrant in the law and constitution for such an enactment. But when Slocum got on his feet, after the clerk had finished the reading of the bill, these wiseacres were treated to a genuine surprise.

"I have here in my hand a copy of the laws of the Territory, passed in the year 18—."

The lawyers present recognized the volume as containing the first territorial enactments, which were a miscellaneous lot indeed, many of which had been repealed, and all considered now as worthless old lumber.

Slocum turned very deliberately to open the book and read the page he had turned down; and as he read, the eyes of his auditors widened

and marks of astonishment became visible on their faces.

Slocum had fished up an old act, long since considered a dead-letter, but which had never been repealed, and which had therefore as much binding force as any other statute. It had been taken, with other laws, from the old legal code of Mexico; all of them being passed in a lump without reading, to save the valuable time of the first Legislature. And there it had lain ever since, until it had been consigned to oblivion in the minds of men.

It was an enactment providing that at any time, if the law-making powers saw fit, the property of the churches, or of any one of them, might be confiscated by the State. It had been a blow aimed at the power of the Mexican priesthood, and it had no business whatever in the code of an American Territory.

Every one recognized that in resurrecting this old law, Slocum was striking at the men who had attempted to defeat him in the late election; and on the faces of his enemies, many of whom were present, consternation was strongly written.

"This act is as much a law to-day as when it was passed," Slocum declared, "and its provisions are exactly applicable to the bill I have introduced, and for whose passage I shall fight with whatever strength lies in me. I have no war to make on the Church named therein. It is a Christian body, whose precepts are glorious and whose work is a blessing to mankind. But whenever any individual member of that body chooses to leave the seclusion of his cloister and publicly attack and vilify me, as has been done to the knowledge of every member on this floor, then I can be no longer expected to remain quiet."

"A certain father, whose name I shall not mention but whom you all know, has treated me calumniously and villainously, even descending to acts which would be a disgrace to a ward politician, and using every means in his power, as well as the influence of his priestly office, against me, following me with a cloud of lies as thick as are the mosquitoes of the lower Mississippi."

"Hence, I introduce this bill; and when it comes from the hands of the committee, I shall struggle and work for its passage with all the energy that's given me."

He sat down amid a storm of applause and and hisses, and a fluttering of handkerchiefs, among which Miss Nevada's was prominent; and there was on his face a look of contentment and the placid smile of one who feels that he has done his duty.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SLOCUM AS A BOXER.

It was this master-stroke that Slocum had in mind when called on by the Hummer, with Jinks and the sport, with reference to the transfer of the Cenci estate to Father Petrie. He would not reveal his plans then, for he was not certain of the exact nature of the enactment, and he wanted time in which to think. Now they had been given to the world in their entirety.

Jones Simpson and Stuttering Sam accompanied the legislator to his room, a short time after, for the purpose of further questioning him on the subject, their minds not being yet entirely clear as to the character of the move.

"I'll tell you," said Slocum, leaning back in his huge arm-chair, when the office had been gained, "that bill won't pass; it can't pass; but this is in confidence, and I don't want it to go any further."

"You've handled the pasteboards, Mr. Hollingsworth, and you know what I mean when I state that I am playing the biggest kind of a game of bluff."

"I've got the poorest hand imaginable; but so long as I can make these other fellows think that I'm holding big cards, I'm all right. And they'll not know any better until it's too late to do them any good."

He smiled complacently, and wiped the beaded sweat from his brow.

"What is it you hope to accomplish?" Simpson inquired.

"You'll have to go to a mole for eyes, Simpson; for I must say you haven't any yourself. Of course that bill can't pass, because of its unconstitutionality. The one which gave me the basis for the attack wouldn't stand the ghost of a show in the courts. But all that is a matter that I don't care a straw for. My object, and my sole object, is to call the attention of the people of Santa Fe to the magnificent gift which Jason Deel has pretended to make to the Church through Father Petrie."

"I have taken a good deal of pains to look the matter up; and with the exception of this gift of Deel's, the only other bequests to the Church are of no consequence whatever. It would take ten thousand of them to equal the gift made by Jason Deel."

"The people are bound to see this; and, trust me for it, the people are not fools. As soon as their attention is drawn, they are sure to see through the swindle; and then friends will flock about Cenci by the score; and valuable friends, whose aid will make him invincible."

"That gift won't stand, gentlemen. It wouldn't stand in law, no way, if properly pressed; that is, if we could prove that Cenci is really entitled to the property."

The Hon. Slocum was a voluminous talker, and when wound up seemed able to run on for hours.

"It's a clever scheme, a great scheme!" and Simpson nodded his head approvingly. "Slocum, you ought to go into the real estate business. You'd make a fortune at it. If you say you will, I'm ready to enter into a partnership with you to-morrow."

"Out of my line entirely, Simpson!" with a deprecatory wave of the fat hand. "I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks."

"You wouldn't have to learn many new ones!" and the stuttering sport laughed.

"I'm a politician, gentlemen, and a member of the legal fraternity!" and Slocum beamed amiably at them. "Politics and law; that's all I know."

"But that isn't to the point. This gift of Deel's is bound to be singled out for comment; and I shall take occasion to hurry this a little and spread the whole thing before the eyes of the people."

"I've got an interest in the *Daily Avalanche*, you know, and whatever I take to the office is sure to go in. Now, I'm going to write this business up in great shape, as a news item, and in addition I shall have an editorial inserted to make the matter more prominent."

Slocum was true to his word; and the next day the *Avalanche* gave up many columns of its valuable space to a discussion of everything pertaining to the proposed confiscation.

Slocum's speech in the legislative body was given in full, together with a copy of the bill, and the law which was its basis; and there were innumerable interviews with prominent persons as to the probability of the bill's passage; with various matters of current gossip connected with this new sensation.

There was also the promised editorial; but the most telling thing of all was the short list naming the various bequests made to the church. It was a short list indeed; and in it Deel's gift stood out with a prominence that could not fail to draw every eye.

Jason Deel became fairly livid with wrath, as he ran down the columns of the *Avalanche* containing these withering exposures.

He had feared something of the kind ever since the introduction of the bill in the Legislature the previous day; and his brain had been a seething caldron of fears and emotions, as he began to realize what a powerful foe he had evoked in Fisher Slocum.

Heretofore he had rather despised the vauntings and puffery of Slocum, looking on him as a small-fry politician of limited brains; a man of bragging words who was in no wise to be feared. But he now began to regard Slocum in quite a different light.

The working of his new scheme against the Hummer was progressing in a most satisfactory way. The man he had induced to undertake the dangerous task of appearing as the Hummer's double was showing himself to be of considerable skill, and had already proven himself a man of daring and cool courage.

A ghastly sort of smile came into Deel's face, even as he gazed at the damaging record in the morning's paper. His spies had brought him word of the secret going of the Hummer to prison—for in many ways these paid spies were as cunning and crafty as their chief.

"That was a long-headed scheme," he muttered, admiring in his foes the qualities which in him were so conspicuous. "A neat little scheme, and a dangerous one. But, my young game-cocks, it won't work! If the Hummer stays in there a month, just so long will the double be quiet; and when he comes out, then the band will play again and the circus will recommence."

He laughed bitterly, and again began his reading.

"I'll have to do up this Slocum in some way! I really fear I must! He's getting altogether too smart and too vindictive. The men who live longest are those who are careful not to unnecessarily run against dangers. Slocum is getting reckless!"

Possibly Deel forgot how frequently he had been placing himself in peril, when he spoke of those who needlessly throw themselves in the way of danger.

As he went on, his rage grew deeper and more vindictive, until, no longer able to control himself, he filled the air with blasphemous maledictions against those who were conspiring for his ruin.

"I'll be even with them yet!" he asserted. "Perhaps they think to head off Jason Deel! I'll show them the metal of which I'm made! I'll overthrow their plans, if I have to destroy myself in doing it! They don't know me, yet, though they think they do. They don't comprehend my resources. I'll pour out money like water, but what I defeat them!"

His hands were working like the talons of a bird of prey, and his eyes burned with a baleful glare that showed the deadliness of his hate.

"This Hummer from Hummingbird thinks to

overwhelm me by combining against me all my enemies, and the Lord knows, they are numerous enough! The Hummer, bah! I can teach him some lessons in craft that he'll remember when his yellow hair turns gray! He's been in the detective line a good bit, I'm told, and thinks himself very smart, and very cute. But I'll learn him a thing or two! I fancy he never met quite another such a man as this Deel he affects to despise!"

He read on and on, fuming and frothing, until the blood in his veins seemed throbbing to burst, and a misty fog swam before his eyes. And as he read, he saw how complete was the exposure contained in the paper, and the fury of relentless hate gained full mastery over him.

He knew that Slocum had been the inspiring cause of it all, if he had not written the articles, and his wrath burned hot against the politician.

At last he could endure it no longer. He folded the paper and crushed it in his hand as if it were a living thing; then, recklessly jamming his hat on his head, he left the office, drawing the door to after him with a bang.

He went down the steps like one who walks in a dream, and saw not the men who stood on the street in the vicinity of his office. He gave no heed to anything but the thoughts that surged within him, and, with eyes fixed glassily on the pavement, hurried from the place.

As if driven by an impulse he could not control, he took his way in the direction of Slocum's office. As he arrived in front of it, he saw the politician leisurely descending the stairway.

Slocum was not aware of Deel's presence; and the latter, with a dangerous glitter in his keen orbs, drew back to await his coming.

"Take that, will you!" Deel cried, springing upon Slocum with the vindictiveness of a tiger, as that pompous individual emerged on the street. "You scoundrel! You double-dyed villain!"

Deel was fairly beside himself with rage, and was so wrought up that he had lost all his customary coolness.

Twice, before the bewildered Slocum could comprehend the nature of the attack, Deel struck at him with his naked fists, one blow bringing a vivid scarlet to the smitten cheek.

"You will slander me, will you?" aiming a third blow, which, if it had reached its mark—the butt of the politician's big ear—would have brought Slocum to the pavement.

But the latter had had time to take in the situation; and, stung to a sudden fury by the blow that had fallen on his cheek, he shook Deel off with a savage energy not to be expected in a man of his leviathan proportions.

Then, as Deel came at him again, impelled by the same tigerish hate which he had already exhibited, Slocum squared himself like a professional boxer; and his fat fist coming in contact with Deel's nose caused the blood to flow in a sensible stream.

Slocum had not always been so bulky and unwieldy. It was said of him that in his youth he had been as trimly built as a clipper ship, and as supple as an acrobat; and that in his early days at college—for Slocum had been at college, though one might not now think it—he had been noted as a boxer.

Deel knew not of these things when he made his unwise attack on the politician, or he might have thought twice before attempting this personal castigation of an enemy. He had not thought of Slocum as a fighter; but he gained a great deal of knowledge on this point within the next few minutes.

Rising, with the blood streaming from his injured nose, he rushed again at his foe, and again went down beneath the sturdy blows of those apparently flabby fists. Flabby as they appeared, however, there was solid bone beneath the soft flesh.

Twice again this was repeated; and the last time, the vindictive Deel did not arise, owing to the fact that he had been knocked senseless; and a crowd having gathered, the injured man was carried away to have his hurts attended to, while Slocum strode off with a carriage that was prouder than that which he had exhibited when descending from the legislative halls, after introducing the bill directed against Father Petrie.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A TANGLED WEB.

"HELLO!"

A night-watchman, passing along his beat on one of the principal streets, came to a sudden halt near one of the large plate-glass windows of a banking-house.

There was a light within the building, but it was not this that had attracted his attention, for a light burned there every night. What riveted his glance was the sight of two men within the building; and these two men appeared to be working vigorously at the big iron safe which held the bank treasures.

"Bold fellows, those!" he soliloquized, drawing back into the shadow that he might observe them for a moment, unsuspected. "They are a brace of fools, though, I must say! I never saw men undertake a riskier piece of work."

It was plain to the night-watchman that a pair of burglars were endeavoring to crack the bank safe. They were down on their hands and knees, being but partially screened by one of the desks, and were drilling and picking away with all their might.

The strange thing about it, however, to the night-watchman, was the fact that they should try so desperate a thing when the chances of discovery were so great. If they were not amateurs without a thimbleful of sense, they must have known the light would reveal them to the patrol; and they could not blow out the light without bringing immediate suspicion and discovery.

As the night-watchman stood within the shadow staring at the industrious but overbold burglars, he made a discovery that caused him to start with surprise.

One of the men within the building was surely the Hummer from Hummingbird, and it seemed equally certain that the other was Cerro Cenci.

The Hummer had been out of the jail, now, for two days. He and Stuttering Sam had been forced to the unwelcome conclusion that their plan for entrapping the Hummer's double had in some manner come to the ears of Jason Deel, or to the double himself. Therefore it was manifestly a foolish thing for Hartsook to remain longer within the prison.

They were compelled to admit that the scheme had woefully miscarried; for, during all the time of the Hummer's imprisonment, the double had not been seen of any man; and now the Hummer had returned to his old haunts and to the room which he had shared in common with Stuttering Sam above the Golconda.

The night-watchman knew that the Hummer was again in town, for he had himself seen him that very day.

"If that ain't Hartsook and Cenci, then I ain't got any eyes in my head!" he declared. "I'm sure I can't be mistaken in the fellows."

It did indeed seem that the burglars were none other than the men he had already named. The Hummer, or the man he believed to be Hartsook, was made conspicuous by the cuckoo-winged hat and the floating blonde hair; and the individual representing Cenci was as exact a counterfeit of that young man as one can imagine. Of course due allowance must be made for the shadows, and the uncertain character of the light.

Having convinced himself on this point, the night-watchman hurried around the building to a position where he could see both the rear and front doors, and then sounded with his club the vibrating rat-tat-tat of the policeman.

The echoes of the call had scarcely died away, before the watchmen and police of the vicinity came running to the scene; and as they drew near, they saw the rear doors of the bank building fly open, and the frightened burglars scud for safety.

The night-watch who had made the discovery had hurried toward these rear doors, as soon as he sounded his alarm, thinking he would be in time to forestall a retreat. He had counted too surely on this, with the result that the men succeeded in breaking away.

He fired at them as they ran, and a pursuit was commenced by those who joined him.

These men had been near enough to witness the escape of the burglars, and to identify them, as they believed, by their appearance.

So close were they to the retreating rascals, that the pursuit soon grew hot and interesting. The fellows were as wily as foxes, and fled from street to street, and from alley to alley, until the outskirts of the town were reached; and then, being pushed hard, they took to the open and desert country, which stretched away toward the mountains.

And into this desolate region they were followed by the police.

The intelligence of the attempt at bank-breaking, and the pursuit of the burglars, spread quickly from lip to lip; and with the account thus carried was borne the statement that the men had been recognized, and were known to be Hike Hartsook and Cerro Cenci.

This unwelcome intelligence reached Stuttering Sam at the Golconda, and he knew that the Hummer's double, with another representing young Cenci, had recommenced his injurious masquerading.

Hartsook was not with him at the time, and he started out to hunt him up and put him on his guard.

To his dismay, he could find Hartsook nowhere; neither could he find Cenci, though he searched the town over.

In this search he learned that the bank burglars, who were reported to be Cerro and the Hummer, had been chased into the desert.

"If I could j-just find them, now!" he exclaimed, referring to those he was seeking. "The whole of this sch-scheme could be laid bare, so that every man might see the truth. If I could only produce them, now!"

He felt that Deel could be thwarted in his villainy, if he could but bring Hartsook and Cenci to the Golconda, and show them there, while these false representatives were known to be in the desert. It would be a positive and overwhelming refutation of the slanderous charges

recently brought, and which were so damaging to the work they had in hand.

In his search, he came upon Clarkson Jinks; and enlisting his services, sent him also to look for the missing men, telling him to report at the Golconda within a specified time, whether the men they sought were found or not.

Jinks entered into hearty sympathy with the efforts of the stuttering sport, and hastened away, determined to visit every familiar rendezvous, and see if Hartsook and Cenci could not be produced at the Golconda as living proofs of their innocence.

But though he searched diligently, it was without avail; and when he met the sport at the gaming-room, he found that Hollingsworth had been equally unsuccessful.

Again they started forth, each going his separate way, determined to make the most of the time that yet remained to them.

Stuttering Sam had not gone two blocks, until he came upon the gladiator; and almost at the same moment, there appeared before him the slight form and well-known figure of Juanita Concha. She was habited as usual; and the sport, staring at her as he had done on previous occasions, felt sure that it could be none other than Juanita.

She turned from him as she had done before, and went in the direction of the Mission. The temptation to follow her was almost irresistible. There was a strange mystery connected with these appearances, a mystery that he would have given much to fathom. But he felt that his first duty was to the Hummer and Cenci, whose exasperating absence at this time disturbed him greatly.

No! he could not follow her, now, much as he desired to. But there was the gladiator.

"You s-s-see that girl?" he questioned, pointing to the retreating figure.

Garcia had seen her; and was now following her with his eyes, his mind filled with wonder and astonishment.

"Ay!" and the gladiator gave his head a vigorous nod. "It is Juanita Concha."

"So it s-seems to me; and yet, th-though I have followed her s-several times, I could never make sure of it. I m-must go on and look for H-Hartsook and Cenci; but you f-follow her, even into the M-Mission itself. Then come and t-tell me what you have discovered."

The gladiator was so confident that the girl was Juanita, that he at once hastened after her. He thought to come up with her in a little while; and purposed to question her sharply as to what she was doing on the streets of Santa Fe at that time of night, unattended. But the girl apparently discovered she was being pursued and still further quickened her footsteps.

"Juanita!" he called, that she might know who he was and not be afraid of him. "Stop for a moment, I would speak to you. It is I, Garcia, the *espada*!"

The girl did not hear, or at least did not heed; but walked on with that alert, quick step, in the direction of the Mission.

Garcia was puzzled. Stuttering Sam had told him how a woman whom he believed to be Juanita had appeared to him, and how, when he had followed her, she had suddenly vanished. The gladiator had not known what to make of these accounts. He could not disbelieve the sport, yet there was something in the stories which seemed incredible. Now, as he hurried on after the girl, the theory propounded by Sam that Juanita was a sleep-walker, recurred to him.

This served to increase his anxiety; and, determined to know the truth, he quickened his pace to a run. Sam's further statement that the sleep-walking theory would scarcely hold, either, for it was not likely that a sleep-walker would lead him into a trap, also came to Garcia, and served to confuse him the more.

But he was not able to come up with her, for she was a rapid walker, and had already gained a considerable distance on him. The patch of gloom near the Mission walls lay as heavily on this night as on the night when Stuttering Sam followed the mysterious figure; and in this gloomy place, she disappeared as she had before.

The gladiator was not close enough to her to determine whether or not she had gone on to the Mission gate; but sure, if the one he was following was Juanita, she would have done so, he continued to that point.

His vigorous raps brought up the gate-keeper, who admitted him; but who, in answering to inquiries, replied that it had been some time since any one had passed through.

This served to further increase the *espada's* confusion; but he resolved to probe the matter to the bottom, and continued on toward the Mission.

Here he met Father Manzantini and the Sister Superior, who were both astonished and alarmed when he related to them what he had seen.

"I do not think Juanita can have been out of the building!" Manzantini gravely replied. "But we will see. If she has, and has only now returned, it will not be difficult to discover it. But I think we shall find her in her room, soundly sleeping."

Manzantini was much shaken by the *espada's*

revelation, and he accompanied the Sister Superior to the girl's room.

Garcia impatiently waited below, stairs for their report.

When they returned, there was a scared look in Manzantini's eyes, and his face was as white as ashes.

"She is not there!" he hoarsely whispered. "Her bed is undisturbed!"

Garcia reeled and caught the wall for support.

"What can be the meaning of it?" he whispered, looking dazedly from Manzantini to the Sister Superior. "I feel certain the girl I saw was Juanita, and she disappeared in the shadows of the wall."

"Are you sure there is no other way of getting in than by the gate?" he queried, after a moment's thought.

The priest shook his head.

"I am sure there is none, save by scaling the walls. It is not likely that Juanita would do that, or could do it."

The affair was becoming more and more mysterious.

"We shall see!" the gladiator cried; and he ran out of the house to make the circuit of the walls.

He walked around their entire length, closely examining them everywhere, but not a thing did he discover. There were no ladders, no ropes, nothing of a suspicious character.

He returned, with his brain whirling in the throes of excited emotion.

During this absence, Father Manzantini and the Sister Superior had made a thorough search of the interior of the Mission, and hospital, and nowhere had found any traces of Juanita.

"It is bad!" and the priest shook his head, mournfully. "I do not understand it. And you say that Juanita has been seen outside the walls before this?"

The Sister Superior was in tears, for she loved Juanita as if she were her own daughter.

"It is inexplicable!" the sadness increasing on the kindly face of the priest. "It passes my comprehension!"

Garcia had no words to offer. His brain seemed locked and his senses dulled by this astounding discovery. Yet, though appearances were so strongly against Juanita, he still clung to his faith in her purity and goodness, and would not for a moment harbor a libelous thought concerning her.

"It will all come clear!" he asserted, after a time, endeavoring to meet the gaze of the priest unflinchingly. "I cannot think she is anything but the innocent child I have always loved. I will believe nothing else, though ten thousand devils should hiss the slander in my ears!"

Then, unable to further control his emotions, he hastened with bowed head from the place.

When he returned to the Golconda, he found Stuttering Sam there; but the latter had been wholly baffled in his search for Hartsook and Cenci. He had had assistants scouring the town in all directions, but the men were not anywhere to be found.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SLOCUM IN HIS ELEMENT.

STUTTERING SAM continued his search through the night, but without result; and the next morning, not knowing what else to do, he called on Slocum, at the lawyer's place of business.

The police force in pursuit of the burglars had remained out through the entire night, and it was said that they had driven those they were chasing far into the desert.

The sport found Jones Simpson and Miss Nevada before him at Slocum's office; and he was not long in discovering, too, that they had come on the same errand.

Nevada had lost much of her air of self-reliance, and was pale and agitated. She knew the charges against Cenci were false in every particular, yet they could not fail to make an impression on her, realizing as she did, that hundreds of people would believe them true.

Cenci's strange disappearance at the time, also troubled her; as it likewise did her father. Jones Simpson was keen enough in matters of business, but these events were so entirely outside the range of his experience that he could not fathom them.

Slocum was sitting in his big, revolving arm-chair, as fat and good-natured and voluble as usual. The only exception to be noted was that he had on a cleaner shirt. A careless indifference to such little matters had characterized him during the canvas, for he thought that it might draw to him more strongly the votes of the humbler element. But now that he had been elevated to place and power, had reached the goal of his earnest endeavors, he felt that more neatness would better become his new station.

Slocum had been scrawling the points of a great speech which he expected to deliver in the halls of the Legislature that afternoon; and his heaped-up manuscript lay on the table before him.

Jones Simpson had been relating to him what he knew of the occurrences of the night; and now that Stuttering Sam was added to the

party, they turned to him for a fuller explanation.

He gave it in his own characteristic way, the politician listening attentively.

"I can't see through the thing," Slocum confessed, when he had given the matter due thought. "I suppose the town feels rather bitter toward Cenci and Hartsook?"

"It does," Simpson returned.

"A most natural feeling under the circumstances," the politician asserted, tenderly nursing his fat chin with one of his pudgy hands. "I don't know what to make of it, myself; but I think I know what to do!"

When it came to scheming, Slocum was in his element.

He turned to his desk, took up a pencil, and for a short time wrote rapidly.

"This is what I have written," and he wheeled around in his arm-chair, holding the penciled paper in his hands:

"FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD."

"We, the undersigned directors of the Twin Peaks Bank of Santa Fe, offer a reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest and conviction of the men guilty of burglariously entering our banking-house on the night of July 15th. We will also give a reward of two hundred dollars for information leading to the discovery of Mike Hartsook and Cerro Cenci, who are missing from the city, but whom we do not believe to have been the parties guilty of entering our banking house, on the night aforesaid, with burglarious intent."

"Signed"

"How does it strike you?" Slocum inquired, when he had finished the reading.

"The b-bank directors will not sign it, I f-fear," was Stuttering Sam's answer.

Slocum winked in his knowing way.

"Trust that to me! I know these bank men; and they'll sign it!"

"I hope you are right," Miss Nevada interposed.

"Of course I'm right!"

"But will they pay the five thousand?" Simpson asked.

"I expect you to pay that, Mr. Simpson?" was the beaming answer.

Simpson stared.

"You don't understand? Let me make it a little clearer to you, then. These bank men probably would not sign that paper, if they were asked to pay the reward. It's too big a reward, and the paper would be obnoxious to them. No doubt they believe Cerro and Hartsook guilty. You say that is becoming the general sentiment of the town. If I didn't know the men so well, I might think it myself."

"These bank men, though, are anxious to apprehend the real thieves, whoever they may be; and if our friend Simpson, here, will guarantee the reward, they will swallow their repugnance to this statement of their belief in our friends' innocence."

"Now, don't interrupt me," waving aside the questions that he saw were about to be framed. "I have shown you that I have control of the columns of the *Avalanche*. I shall insert a copy of this offer of reward in the paper."

"Then I will have an account of the attempted burglary written up in a manner to favor the theory of our friends' innocence."

He took up a copy of the *Morning Avalanche*, lying on his desk, and turned to the columns devoted to city affairs.

"Ah, here it is! The industrious reporter has been a little ahead of me. But fortunately, the account is very meager and unsatisfactory."

He proceeded to read it aloud.

"You will see that it gives us plenty of room to work on," turning from the paper to his visitors.

Again he beamed in his knowing way.

"Those reporters know me and they know that Cenci and Hartsook are my friends. In view of all that's happened, that fact couldn't have escaped their keen eyes. They are aware of another thing, too; and that is, that if they should displease me greatly, their reportorial heads would come off."

His elephantine chest expanded at this contemplation of his power.

"Hence, they have dealt with the subject very lightly, making the barest mention of the statement made by the night-watchman."

"I'll put a flea into their ears, this afternoon, and to-morrow the reporters will come out boldly on our side."

"Not only that, but I shall write an editorial, calling the attention of the public to the reward offered by the bank officials, and to the statement made in that offer, that the directors do not think the Hummer and Cenci the guilty parties."

"And in that editorial, I shall battle for a milder judgment against the accused men until all the facts in the case are known."

He had gone on with his statements and the unfolding of his plans without stopping to inquire if Jones Simpson would be willing to pay the reward. He believed he could induce Simpson to do this, for the boomer sympathized greatly with his daughter in her present grief, and was in addition a man of considerable liberality.

"You've been thinking whether the payment of that five thousand would seriously cripple your business or not at the present time?" turning on Simpson.

"Now, I don't expect you to pay it. If it's ever claimed, which is extremely doubtful, Cenci can pay it out of his estate—for there's no doubt in my mind that he will ultimately gain the land."

A radiant look came into the face of Miss Nevada. This meant, if it meant anything, that the cloud which now hung over the young man's good name would be cleared away.

"I say, it's not at all likely that this reward will ever be claimed," Slocum continued. "If it ever should be claimed, however, you may take my word for it that the claimant will be the Hummer; and in that event, I am sure the payment of it would be to Cenci only a pleasure."

This was a view in which all could heartily concur.

Having thus outlined his plans, after a further discussion of ways and means, Slocum's visitors left him alone, that he might begin the work.

A copy of the offer of reward, together with the promised editorial and the reporter's accounts of the affair, appeared in the *Avalanche's* evening edition, and had a marked influence on the sentiments of the people; and more of the same sort followed in the paper of the following morning, still tending to temper the harshness of the public judgment; and Miss Nevada, as she read them in the seclusion of her room, wept grateful tears, and really felt that if it were the proper thing to do she would like to hug the puffy neck of the long-headed politician who was proving such a true friend to her lover in this time of distress.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TABLES TURNED.

STUTTERING SAM was from the first convinced that Jason Deel was at the bottom of all this trouble; and after a day spent in a vain search for the missing Hummer and his companion, he determined to go to Deel and by force or threats wrest from him the secret of the whereabouts of these men.

He was not unmindful of the value of the work being done by Slocum; and, in the changed tone of the people he met, he could already see its good effects.

Simpson had related to him the incidents connected with the visit of Slocum and himself to the directors of the bank—for the two had gone there alone—and the ease with which the astute politician had overcome the scruples of the officials as to the signing of the reward offer.

The sport thought of going to Slocum for further advice, since he had managed this business so shrewdly, but he came to the conclusion that the honorable gentleman might endeavor to dissuade him from the course he had mapped out.

In spite of his perturbed state, he succeeded in obtaining some needed sleep, that afternoon; but with the coming of night, he was again alert and vigilant.

He waited until a late hour, and then approached Jason Deel's residence. Deel was an old bachelor, and lived alone with only a single manservant to attend to his wants.

The hour was so late that the sport was confident that he would find Deel at home instead of at his office.

"I b-hope he ain't in bed yet!" he muttered, as he stood before the house and looked up at the one window that showed a light. "But wh-whether in bed or not, I intend to r-roust him out and make him t-tell me what he's done with the Hummer and Cenci."

He advanced to the door and rapped softly on it, having mentally outlined his plan of action.

After a time of waiting, the servant opened the door and poked out his head.

"I w-wish to see Mr. Deel," said the sport, half fearing that the servant might recognize him.

"Mr. Deel sees nobody at this time o' night!" With this assertion, the man drew back and attempted to close the door in the sport's face.

But the latter had anticipated some such movement, and was prepared for it. Before the servant could pull the door to, Sam thrust his shoulders into the doorway.

"There are ex-exceptions to all rules I suppose, and th-this is one of the exceptions!"

He forcibly pushed the door open and crowded his way into the room.

The servant drew back in fright.

"I can see Mr. D-Deel, can't I?" closing the door after him with his foot, and thrusting a revolver into the man's face. "I always l-like to be polite, and w-w-wouldn't think of going upstairs without your consent. Mr. Deel w-will be glad to see me, won't he? He's been looking for me, h-hasn't he?"

The servant was trembling in every limb, and seemed about to drop to the floor. As the sport asked the questions, he thrust the weapon still nearer the man's nose.

"Y-y-yes," the servant chattered, his knees fairly knocking together, so great was his terror.

"That's kind! I observe, my fr-friend, that you stutter quite as ba-bad as I do. That's a bond of union that ought to m-make us friends. Th-the fraternal bands of Free-masonry oughtn't to be anywhere a-a-along side of it."

The stuttering sport fully understood that the seared servant had stammered because of his fright, and he seemed determined to increase, if possible, the man's terror.

"Get down on your m-marrowbones there, and hold up your hands! If you d-d-don't, I'll have to b-bust our fraternal bonds with a bullet. I w-won't hurt you, if you ac-act sensible. If you k-kick up a row, I'll not be responsible for the c-consequences."

The man dropped upon his knees and held his hands aloft in a most obedient way.

The sport's tones had been low but earnest, such as could not reach Deel on the floor above, but which were well calculated to bring the servant into quick submission.

"H-hold your hands out here, and don't be slow about it!" producing with his left hand a ready-made slip-noose, and with his right still threatening the man.

The man did as he was told without question.

In an instant the noose had been dropped about the wrists, and a half-hitch taken to further tighten it.

When this had been accomplished, the sport placed a cocked revolver on the floor where it would be in easy reach.

"Now I'm going to t-t-tie you up, my good fellow, so that you c-c-can't give warning to the gentleman up there. I've planned a little surprise party on him, and I kn-know he'd feel m-m-most awfully bad if the surprise part of it should m-miscarry."

More rope was produced; and the servant, completely cowed, offered no resistance as Stuttering Sam proceeded to bind him.

When this had been accomplished in a manner satisfactory to the sport, he drew a piece of soft cloth from one of his pockets, wrapped about a bit of cord, and fashioned it into a gag.

"You will ap-appreciate my k-kindness, I know," smiling grimly at the man. "Th-this is a very soft and tender g-g-gag, and won't h-hurt you if you don't tr-try to fancy yourself a r-runaway horse and this a bit, and p-p-pull too hard on it."

The look in the eyes of the bound servant showed that this was a kind of humor he could not appreciate. But it was too late to offer any resistance now, even if he had had the courage.

When the gag was thrust into his mouth, and the cords holding it in place fastened behind his ears, he cast on the sport a glance of mingled reproach and hate, but that was as far as his resentment could go.

"N-n-now I'm going to leave you here, and try to g-get an interview with your master."

With this, the sport turned the key in the lock, and taking up his revolver, tip-toed softly up the stairway.

Jason Deel was in his bedchamber, but the events of the day had not been such as to bring a tendency to sleepiness.

He had brought a bundle of papers with him from the office, and was endeavoring to occupy himself and distract his troubled thoughts by looking them over.

He had heard nothing of the struggle below stairs, if it may be called a struggle, and so was wholly unprepared for the visit of the sport.

The door of the bedroom was slightly ajar, and Stuttering Sam pushed it wider open and peered within.

His revolver was in his hand, and he was ready to fight or flee as occasion demanded.

His intention had been to surprise Deel, and choke him into telling what he knew of the Hummer and Cenci; but as he saw Deel sitting before his lamp absorbed in his papers, the sport changed his plan.

He advanced with noiseless footsteps, sunk quietly into a chair which faced toward Deel, then brought his weapon up to a level with Deel's body.

"G-good-evening!" he said, in his smoothest tones.

Deel dropped his papers, and wheeled as if on a pivot, a startled look on his face. He had not dreamed that any one was in the room. When he saw the sport sitting so calmly, and yet determinedly, with leveled pistol, he shrunk back with a gasp.

"Take it c-c-cool, friend Deel!" a grim smile flitting over his countenance. "I thought I'd just plan a little surprise-party on you. Surprise-parties are often great h-humbugs, in that they don't surprise an-anybody, but I f-fancy this is the genuine article."

A chill of fear swept over Deel. He was a man of courage, but no courage could resist an assault like this.

"What do you want of me?" he hoarsely asked.

"That's striking p-pay-dirt, at the first clip. You always were a man of business. I want to kn-know what you have done with Cenci and the Hummer?"

Deel's agitation visibly increased.

"I don't know anything about them!" he declared, striving to overcome the trembling that

affected him. "I've been told they were chased into the desert."

"Wh-which you know is a lie!" with stern menace. "I know that you kn-know where they are, and I've come here to m-make you tell me."

The bitter hate which flamed in Deel's face almost drove out the look of fear. There was a table a few feet away, and toward this as the sport spoke, he had longingly turned his eyes. Stuttering Sam had noted the action.

"You wouldn't say that to me if circumstances were changed," the threatened man hotly declared, slightly pushing back his chair.

"No, you don't, my r-rooster!" rising to his feet as he said it, but still keeping Deel covered. "You've got a pistol in that drawer, I reckon?"

Deel made no reply to this, but throwing the chair from him, sprung toward the table.

The last thing in the world that the stuttering sport meant to do was to shoot this man, for the killing or maiming of a human being was a thing most distasteful to him. He had only meant to threaten Deel and cow him into submission.

He saw Deel's proposed movement in time to lower the hammer of his revolver and thrust the weapon into his pocket. Then he leaped forward, hoping to interpose his body between Deel and the table, as the table was nearest him.

Stuttering Sam was as quick and agile as was Deel, and he was also much the stronger. Both rushed toward the table, and this movement of the sport so excited Deel that, although he succeeded in reaching the table first, he overturned it in his efforts to get into the drawer.

The table came down with a crash that resounded through the house.

The sport leaped upon Deel, giving him a blow that stretched him across the overturned table. Deel, however, was by no means "knocked out," but before he could struggle to his feet, Stuttering Sam was upon him, and a fierce combat ensued.

Over and over they rolled upon the floor, each striving by every art known to him, to gain the mastery. Not a cry or sound was uttered by either. In silence they fought, as men fight who feel that life may hang on the issue.

The strength of the sport, however, turned the scales of victory. He succeeded in getting Deel beneath him, and then gripping him by the throat, speedily reduced him to subjection.

"Sit down there!" he commanded, pushing Deel from him, and before the latter could recover his breath, Stuttering Sam had again drawn his revolver, and was seated calmly on the upturned table containing Deel's weapon.

"Sit d-d-down there! I don't w-want to shoot you, but you must not tempt me too far!"

Deel realized that he had been defeated, and was at the mercy of his foe, and so crouched obediently on the floor. But the most vindictive hate shone in his eyes.

"Now t-tell me where those men are!" the sport ordered in a voice of firm determination. "I've f-fooled with you just long enough."

"I don't know; and if I did, I wouldn't tell you!" Deel retorted, glaring defiance. "You can shoot me, if you will, and you'll have the fun of hanging for it; but I won't tell you anything!"

"You're a gr-gritty scoundrel!" the sport observed. "I'm only sorry you're f-fighting on the wrong side."

"I'll have you in jail for this outrage!" Deel threatened.

"Oh, n-no you won't! I presume it isn't j-just the proper thing to en-enter a man's house, and to do as I've done, but you'll not j-jail me for it. Deel, you don't d-d-dare to!"

Deel knew that this was true—that it would not be a wise thing for him to venture into the courts.

"If you d-don't tell me where those men are, I'll—"

What terrible thing he would have done was not made known, for the revolver was suddenly knocked from his hand, and he found himself in the grasp of a man who had entered the room as stealthily as he had himself done a short time before.

The sport was completely taken by surprise; and Deel coming to the assistance of his rescuer, Stuttering Sam was quickly overpowered and bound.

He fought savagely, but the two men were too much for him.

"Aha!" and Deel glowered fiercely down on him, as he lay helpless on the floor. "The tables are turned, with a vengeance!"

He took up the sport's revolver, and placed it in his own pocket.

Stuttering Sam paid no heed to his words or actions. He was striving to see who this new-comer was that had so suddenly attacked him. The latter accommodately came round to where Deel was standing. The sport gave a start of astonishment.

The man he saw was the Hummer's double!

CHAPTER XL.

OUT OF THE TOILS.

It will be remembered that on two occasions, Stuttering Sam had seen the man who was impersonating the Hummer, and that, on the

first occasion, he had had a very good view of the fellow's face.

At this time the man did not have on the disguising mustache and blonde wig, neither did he sport the cuckoo-winged hat; but Stuttering Sam recognized him quite as well as if he had worn those things.

He greatly resembled the Hummer in general appearance, being of about the same height and build, and his face also bore some of the Hummer's characteristic features. But without the disguises no one could possibly have mistaken the one for the other.

The double of the Hummer joined Deel in his sarcastic smile.

"You've been wanting to know where your friends are; and I guess I'll have to relieve your anxiety by taking you to them," Deel declared. "I ought to give you a good thrashing and turn you into the street; but that would probably please you too well, for it would leave you free to go on with your devilment."

The sport ventured no reply. At that time silence seemed to be the part of wisdom. He was helpless and in the power of these men.

"You are not in such a hurry to know where they are, as you were a while ago?" was Deel's sarcastic comment. "I presume your desires have changed with your change of condition."

The Hummer's double did not speak, probably because he feared the tones of his voice might be remembered at some future time to his detriment.

Deel, however, drew him into the hallway and questioned, in a whisper:

"You came at a most opportune time; how did you get here? I thought they had run you out of the country."

"But I wouldn't stay run out," the fellow answered, in the same guarded tones. "I gave them the slip and back-tracked it for the city."

"And Cenci?" with a smile at the name.

"Oh, he came with me. He is somewhere in town now. I thought you might need me, and so I come straight to the house here. I found the door locked, and when I knocked I heard a groan; and so I came straight in. A locked door doesn't stand long in my way, you know."

He grinned as he made the assertion.

"He hasn't killed my servant?" and a black look came to Deel's face.

"Oh, no," grinning again, as if the matter were the merest joke. "He just tied him up like a thanksgiving turkey, and stuck a rag in his mouth."

"When I got inside I heard the racket upstairs, and so didn't take time to stop and untie him. He's down there yet, groaning and rolling his eyes like a cat."

"Go down and untie him!" Deel commanded, for the servant was a favorite. "It makes me feel like killing that sport yet!"

The man disappeared, to return shortly with the one who had been bound. The latter limped painfully, and moved with a clumsiness that was the effect of the tightly-drawn cords. But his tongue was limber enough; and when his eyes fell on the stuttering sport, he began to pour out a volume of vituperations.

"Cut that short!" said Deel, curtly. "We haven't time for anything of that kind."

The servant held his tongue, but he gave Stuttering Sam a most murderous look. It is your small, cowardly spirits who are the most vindictive and vengeful. Evidently this servant would never forgive the sport to his dying day.

Again Deel whispered to the false Hummer; and again the latter disappeared. This time he did not return so soon.

Deel fished his own revolver out of the table drawer and placed it in his hip-pocket.

"I prefer my own tools," he quietly observed, "and as I'm not a petty thief, I'll return yours to you, at some future time, when you can't do me any harm with it."

The retort that though Deel was not a petty thief, he was still a thief, was on Stuttering Sam's tongue; but he wisely restrained himself, and did not give it utterance.

"Your friends will be glad to see you, no doubt," Deel continued, apparently delighting in inflicting this small kind of torture. "I expect they're lonesome, too, and your society will be a most valuable addition."

"You intend to take me to them?"

"I most certainly do, my esteemed stutterer! They're in a most delightful place. The scenery surpasses my poor powers of description. You'll like it, I know. And then the climate! I've never tried it myself, but it's said to be superb. I am told that some capitalists are thinking of erecting a sanitarium there, next year."

The words were bitter and biting; and although they stung the sport to the quick, he gave no sign.

The Hummer's double returned at this point, and beckoned with his hands.

"Everything ready, eh?" and Deel arose from the chair in which he had been resting.

"It's past midnight," drawing out his handsome gold watch and glancing at the dial. "We've a long journey before us, and we'll have to hump ourselves."

As if this were a signal, the man came forward and grasped Stuttering Sam by the shoul-

ders; and the servant coming to his assistance, they lifted him between them and bore him toward the stairway.

Down this they passed, Jason Deel following close at their heels.

The sport made no resistance, but suffered himself to be borne quietly. When the street was reached, he glanced quickly about to see if any one was within hearing. No one was in sight; and realizing that it would be useless to call, he still remained silent, while being carried toward the alley.

He feared the treacherous nature of Deel, but he thought it useless to begin a struggle that could only end in blows and injuries to himself.

There was a closed carriage in the alley, and into this he was lifted by the two men. When he had been thrust in, the Hummer's double climbed in beside him, while Jason Deel mounted to the driver's seat in front, and took the reins.

The servant unhitched the horses from the post to which they had been tied, and then turned back toward the house. Doubtless he was under instructions to remain there to show that the house was not vacant, and answer any inquiries that might be made for Deel.

Deel lifted the whip from its socket, and gave the horses a cut that sent them spinning down the street at a rattling gait. Apparently, he knew how to handle the lines as well as any professional driver.

The street was dark and deserted, and it would have been impossible for any occupants of the houses to know who were in the nocturnal vehicle, even if any of them had been awake and observing, which was probably not the case.

Deel, crouched on the front seat, with his shoulders drawn up and his hat pulled over his eyes, would scarcely have been recognized in the gloom, had he been met by a familiar acquaintance.

The Hummer's double sat grimly at the side of the bound sport. When the carriage started, he ostentatiously drew out and cocked a revolver. Its ominous "click, click" came sharply to Stuttering Sam.

"I have orders to shoot you, if you try to make a break," the fellow said, in a strained and husky voice which was obviously not his natural one. "I shouldn't want to do it, you understand; but I'm bound to obey orders."

As the sport did not reply, the scamp leaned comfortably back in the corner of the seat and placed the threatening revolver on his knees.

The furious pace was kept up until the streets were passed and the open country gained. Then Deel drew the horses down into a steadier trot.

All this while, the sport's mind had not been inactive. He had been wondering how much of truth there was in Deel's statement that he was to be taken to the place where the Hummer and Cenci were held. Heretofore, he had believed that they were kept as close prisoners somewhere in the city. Present developments tended to show that such was not the case.

Still, he could not be certain that Deel was not lying to him; for he had no faith whatever in the man's veracity. Perhaps he was being taken to some out-of-the-way place, where he would be murdered and his body concealed so that it could not be discovered. Even the suggestion of this probability was not pleasant.

This last thought pressed so on his mind, that he determined to escape, if he could possibly do so.

Several miles had been passed over before he made even a motion looking toward his release. Then, as the guard had for some time been quiet, he began to work slowly and stealthily at the bonds on his wrists, stopping every now and then to see if his movements were noted.

He did not make much progress at first, because of the caution he was compelled to observe, but after a time, he felt that the cords had loosened slightly, and his hopes correspondingly rose.

With the persistent energy of a gnawing rat, he worked away, almost fearing to breathe. At that moment, when liberty seemed so near, detection would have been crushing.

Fortunately the gloom within the carriage was nearly impenetrable, and the bounding of the vehicle and the clatter of the horses' hoofs served to deaden what little noise he was making. They were tossed about, too, by the uneven surface of the road, and this further aided in the concealment of his movements.

After what seemed an age of torturing suspense and anxiety, the bonds were sufficiently loosened to permit him to withdraw one of his hands. He cautiously drew it out, and sat for a time considering the best course to pursue.

The revolver still lay on the guard's lap but whether the fellow was asleep or awake, Stuttering Sam could not determine.

It did not take the sport long to decide what to do. He drew up his right hand and delivered the false Hummer a blow on the side of the head with his clinched fist. He had feared to wait until he had loosened the cords that held his feet, knowing that to untie them he would be forced to lean forward, thus increasing the chances of discovery.

Both hands were free, even though the cord dangled from one of his wrists. If he could dispose of the guard without attracting Deel's attention, the release of his feet would be the work of a moment.

The blow was almost of sufficient force to have stunned an ox, and the guard sunk back in the seat without a struggle. Stuttering Sam grasped the revolver to keep it from slipping to the floor, almost holding his breath, as he strained his ears to discover if Deel had heard the slight sound; at the same time, he kept his right fist upraised to repeat the blow, should the guard show signs of returning consciousness.

Deel, who never once dreamed of such a daring attempt being made, was closely watching his horses as he urged them onward through the darkness, hearing nothing but the rhythmic beat of their hoofs, and the thump and rattle of the carriage.

Having satisfied himself that Deel was still unconscious of what had occurred, the sport reached over and softly drew the knife from the false Hummer's belt—his own had been taken from his pocket at Deel's house—and with its keen blade, he quickly cut the cords from about his ankles and severed the one that still clung to his wrist.

Then, holding the revolver and knife in readiness, he pushed aside one of the curtains of the carriage, placed a foot on the projecting step, and swung lightly to the ground.

Still, Deel remained ignorant of the escape of his prisoner, and drove steadily on, his energies absorbed in guiding the horses and watching the route.

Stuttering Sam had no sooner touched the ground than he discovered that they had not been following a beaten road or trail, but that they were in an open country; and that Deel was choosing the roughest and rockiest line of flight, no doubt to hide his trail and prevent pursuit.

"Well, I'm out of that old h-hearse!" the stuttering sport muttered, staring at the retreating vehicle, "and I'll not go back into it without a f-fight!"

He had thrown himself flat on the earth, so that if Deel should chance to look back he could not see him, and the carriage loomed large on his vision against the sky-line.

He glanced at the stars and made a note of the direction Deel was taking. The course was almost due southwest.

"If the r-r-rascal is following a bee-line, and I suppose he is, as n-near as the surface of the country will permit, then the H-Hummer and Cenci are held somewhere out here in the desert. P-perhaps they're in the m-mountains beyond."

To make sure that Deel did not veer from his general course, he got up and ran on after the carriage. It had vanished from sight, so that he felt safe against being seen, and he followed it by the sound alone.

He kept up this pursuit for probably ten minutes, during all of which time the carriage maintained the same direction. Then he stopped. The sounds of the grinding wheels came no more to his ears. They had suddenly ceased.

"The ch-ch-chap has got over the headache I gave him!" bending to listen. "It must be th-that; and Deel has found out that I'm n-not there. They'll be c-c-coming back in a minute to look for me."

He cast about for a place to secrete himself, and selected the top of a flat rock which rose some distance above the plain. It seemed unlikely that any one would think of looking for him on top of the bald rock, when there were cactus and bunches of chaparral sprawled everywhere, and which seemed to offer a more inviting place of concealment.

He mounted to the top of the rock, and lay flat down on it, knowing that in the gloom, he would seem no more than a boulder. Should they approach too near and discover him, he had a good chance to slide down the rear of the rock and escape.

It was not long before he heard the vehicle returning, coming at a slow pace.

When it came within sight, from his high perch he saw that Deel was walking at the horses' heads, and that the other man was some distance in advance, looking eagerly on all sides, as he proceeded.

They passed along in a slow and solemn way, saying nothing and endeavoring to make as little noise as possible. When he had gone some distance beyond the rock, the man halted and waited for Deel to come up with him.

"Unless he fell and hurt himself we'll never find him," the false Hummer declared. "I haven't the least idea where the thing happened. You may not have gone a hundred yards before I came round, and you may have gone two miles."

Deel uttered a string of suppressed maledictions, bitterly cursing the fellow for his negligence and stupidity.

The man defended himself sharply; then they moved on again, and soon disappeared in the gloom.

When they could no longer be heard, the sport descended from his perch, and by a circuitous route made his way back to Santa Fe.

CHAPTER XLII.
IN THE DESERT.

On the night of the mysterious disappearance of the Hummer, Cenci and Juanita Concha, the Hummer and Cenci had been spending an hour or so in the Mexican quarters, thinking it possible that by a chance they might run against the witness who had so strangely disappeared.

On their return homeward, they were set on by a half-dozen villainous Mexicans, and although they made as good a fight as they could, they were overpowered.

They did not know any of the attacking party, but they instantly guessed that Deel had instigated the assault.

When they had been reduced to proper subjection, and rendered helpless by bonds and gags, they were carried to a small house in an obscure quarter, and held there until long past midnight.

Before they were taken away, Juanita Concha was brought in, also. She had been weeping bitterly, and was in a state of great prostration. When she had gained sufficient self-control to talk, she related to them the details of her abduction, for the guards stationed at the doors and windows seemed not to care how much they conversed, so long as they made no outcry or attempt at escape.

She had gone up to her room with the intention of retiring, and sat for some time looking out on the starlit night.

She had not dreamed of danger, and the window overlooking the city was open.

After a time she had turned from the window, and kneeling before the altar, holding her crucifix, was offering up her nightly prayer.

Suddenly, and without warning, a man sprang through the window into the room, clasped her about the waist, and placed a heavy hand over her mouth to keep her from screaming. She confessed she did not see his face, for the shock was so great that she turned giddy and deathly faint, and almost lost consciousness.

Then she was enveloped in the folds of a heavy blanket, and carried toward the window. A ladder had been placed against it, and another man was there into whose arms she was given.

"I suppose neither of the scoundrels was Deel or Petrie?" the Hummer questioned, at this point.

"I do not know; I cannot say!" she panted, putting up her hands as if to thrust back the terrible remembrance. "Yet, before I was borne from the place, it seems to me that I heard, as if in a dream, Father Petrie's voice. But it may have been only a fancy."

The Hummer smiled grimly.

"Go on," he said. "I'll not interrupt you again."

Then she told how she had been carried down the ladder and toward the wall, against which the ladder was erected. She could not recall all the details, for she had been half dead with fright.

Then, when the Mission was left behind, she had been borne by devious ways to this place.

There was no doubt in the minds of the Hummer and Cenci, that Father Petrie was an active participant in the girl's abduction, and that he had been so at Deel's behest.

The guards at the doors and windows tramped monotonously up and down their short beats, until finally some horses were brought up in front of the little house.

These were duly caparisoned for a long ride, and for Juanita there was a side-saddle. Upon three of these horses the prisoners were placed. Cenci and the Hummer were bound to the animals, though Juanita, probably in consideration of some order given by Father Petrie, was left free. But she was too crushed and broken in spirit to make any effort at escape, even had the chances been good, which they were not.

Around them stood the armed guard with rifles in readiness, and Hartsook and Cenci readily saw that these men were villainous enough to commit murder, with but a shadow of provocation.

The only other person they saw, was an old woman who skulked by, hastening her footsteps when she saw this armed force. The guard paid no heed to her, and evidently did not fear her.

Neither Deel nor Petrie came near. The guards, however, were commanded by one of their number, and at his orders the journey was commenced.

It was a strange journey, and to Juanita, a most terrifying one.

When they were out of the city, the guards conversed glibly with each other in their own abominable dialect, seeming not to care if Juanita and Cenci understood.

Although it was midsummer, the night in the desert was cool; but when the sun arose the next morning, the heat soon grew oppressive.

A breakfast was cooked on the sand with mesquite boughs, and a liberal portion given to the prisoners. The guards seemed to hold no enmity toward the people they were thus carrying away, and in most ways treated them not unkindly.

Juanita was completely worn out by the long ride, though the Hummer and Cenci stood it fairly well, and the escort appeared to be as fresh as at starting.

There was a spring at this point, and though

the waters were villainously alkaline, the guards refilled their water-bottles as if preparing for a long trip.

Throughout the day they toiled on, seeing scarcely a sign of life, and no human presence. As the sun mounted to the zenith, the atmosphere grew hotter and hotter, the sun's rays being reflected back by the half-naked sand and gravel, until the temperature became almost unendurable.

The horses drooped their heads and lagged wearily, but the drivers goaded them on and on. But one halt was made before the coming of night, and that was when Juanita showed such complete signs of exhaustion, that a short stop was rendered necessary.

Just as the sun sunk to rest, they came to a small village of mud-huts on the banks of a little stream, where grew a few bushes and some grain-crops raised with irrigation.

The village was inhabited by a degraded class of Indians, much lower than the Pueblos in the scale of civilization, and the prisoners soon found that among these they were to be held.

As they drew near, all the occupants of the village swarmed out, staring at them with every mark of curiosity.

By what subtle influence Father Petrie had gained a power over these half-savage villagers, the Hummer and Cenci were at a loss to determine. But they learned afterward, that it was through the mysterious functions of the priesthood, for these people were, in a way, believers in the Christian religion, as taught by the New Mexican priests.

Their attitudes and exclamations of astonishment showed them to be much excited and bewildered over the character and appearance of those who were being brought to them as prisoners.

It was manifest that they had expected to behold some horrible sort of monsters or demons.

Father Petrie was well-known to them, this village being one of his charges, and only a few days before he had paid them a visit. He had at that time told them that he meant to send to them for safe-keeping some bad men and a bad woman, and his talk had given them the impression that this woman and these men were not at all of the ordinary character, but were blood-eating demons; and that if they were allowed to escape, they would return and destroy their late keepers, so great was their hellish bloodthirstiness.

It is little to be wondered at, then, that these poor people, who were ignorant, degraded and superstitious, and who had strangely mingled the ogreish character of their old religion with the basest superstitions of the new, should look so curiously at the prisoners who had been brought them.

When they had satisfied their wonder, they returned, chattering and gesticulating to their mud-huts, leaving an old priest or chief with the guards, as their spokesman.

This man was not a whit cleaner or more intelligent-looking than the others, but he had the stoop of age, and his long white hair gave him a patriarchal appearance.

"My children," he said, speaking to the guards in their own language, and glancing from them to the prisoners and back again, "my people have been afraid, on account of these you bring among us. They said they could not sleep with them in the village, and so they have prepared places for them in the rocks yonder. I will show you the way."

A line of rocky bluffs arose from the river, a short distance away, and toward these he turned and hobbled, looking back occasionally to see that his charges were following him.

When the bluffs were reached, three or four small caves were found hollowed out between the ledges of rock. Into these the prisoners were shown, Juanita being assigned to one cave, and the Hummer and Cenci to another.

Then food was brought to them and to the guards by the villagers, after which, the latter silently withdrew into their mud-huts.

"If the guards leave us here with these ignorant folk, I think we can get away," the Hummer whispered to Cenci.

He found, later, however, that an escape was not as easy as he was inclined to imagine.

CHAPTER XLII.

CENCI AS A COMFORTER.

THE guards departed the next morning; but a guard composed of villagers, who were equally vigilant, was stationed on the rocks before the little caves. They were armed with bows and spears, and these they flourished vigorously and warningly, whenever any of the prisoners came in sight.

They had brought breakfast to their captives, but would not enter into any conversation with them, when Cenci questioned them in the Mexican tongue.

"The rascals understand me well enough!" Cenci asserted, when they had gone away. "But they won't talk. I know they understand me, for the guards spoke to them in a Spanish dialect, and they understood them very well."

As the day passed and the sentinels showed no signs of moving from their stations, Hart-

sook and Cenci became wearied of the close confinement of their rocky quarters and ventured outside, in spite of the uplifted and brandished spears.

A survey convinced them that they could not hope to get away by making a desperate dash. They were weaponless, and while the guards were armed only in the most primitive manner, yet bows and spears were better than no weapons at all, and in trained hands could be made very effective.

"I've no doubt the beggars know how to use these things," said the Hummer, looking calmly at the shouting natives. "And there are twenty of them to one of us, if we don't count Juanita."

Cenci turned toward the cave occupied by the girl and saw her looking out at them.

"Come out in the sunshine," he cried, cheerily. "They'll not hurt us, if we don't try to get away. They think to scare us a bit, and keep us in due subjection by their howling, that's all. Not one of them has offered to shoot an arrow, or hurl a spear."

Juanita's face was very pale, and she seemed greatly distressed; but she had recovered somewhat from her fatigue and had removed as well as she could the stains of travel from her clothing.

She came out in response to his invitation, and the three sat together on a flat stone, in full view of the screeching sentinels.

"I've been wondering, Miss Concha," and Cenci looked at the villagers as he spoke, "why you were brought here. There is nothing strange in the case of Hartsook and me. But why were you brought here?"

The journey together, and the circumstances of their captivity, had made them feel toward each other as if they were acquaintances of long standing.

"Petrie and Deel are both afraid of her," Hartsook observed. "I have known that for a great while. I haven't been able to get behind the mystery of it, yet, but I mean to if I live."

Juanita looked at him strangely.

"I am in sober earnest," said the Hummer. "Both of them fear you, and hate you, quite as much as they fear and hate Cenci. To me, they have seemed to be combating both of you in all their intrigues; and this abduction proves that they are quite as anxious to remove you from Santa Fe, as they were to remove Cenci and me."

Some strange thought seemed to strike him as he looked at the two, for he smiled in an odd and curious way; but whatever the thought was, he kept it to himself.

After a little he got up and walked slowly back and forth along the face of the bluff, leaving Cenci and the girl sitting together on the flat stone.

The natives had about reached the conclusion that no effort at escape was to be made, and had quieted down, though they remained in full view, and were as watchful as ever.

Cenci's heart bled for the young girl who had been thus rudely torn from her familiar surroundings and thrust out here among these half-savage villagers. He observed that she had been but recently weeping.

"This is a severe blow to you, Miss Concha, but perhaps it will serve to reveal to you who are your friends and who are your foes. I think you haven't a worse enemy on earth than this same Father Petrie."

The statement seemed to pain her, and she kept her eyes bent on the ground, as he continued:

"I have been kept posted as to many things occurring in the Mission lately, and this fact has stood out very prominently."

He then in a slow and deliberate way proceeded to mention the various misdeeds of this base priest, especially those in any way connected with Juanita. He dwelt on Petrie's efforts to force her into taking orders, that he might send her out of the country, and endeavored to show that the priest's reason for doing so was a desire to be rid of her presence.

He also spoke at some length of the various other acts known to him, tending to reveal Petrie's true character. Of the burning of the records; the exclusion of the friends of Stuttering Sam, when he lay there sick in the hospital; the stealthy visits which Deel made to the priest; and lastly, Juanita's abduction.

From the mention of Stuttering Sam in the hospital, it was an easy step that led to a discussion of the sport's love for the Catholic girl.

Juanita's mind was of so simple and open a character, and she was so trustful and childlike in all her thoughts, that Cenci had no difficulty in broaching this subject.

After he had talked awhile, she opened her heart to him as she had to the gladiator, on a previous occasion, and told him of her hopes and fears, speaking to him as freely as if he had been her own brother.

She did not say as much, but Cenci saw clearly that she loved Stuttering Sam with the whole strength of her unsullied affections; and his own love for Nevada Simpson caused him to take on himself the part of a comforter, and endeavor to lead her into a better knowledge of

the character of the sport, of his love for her, and of the true nature of her own feelings for him.

He could see that his words fell on good ground, and that they were destined to bear fruit. The revelation of Father Petrie's duplicity opened her eyes for a reception of the truth. Save this priest, no one had spoken ill of the sport; who was in truth a sport no longer, but a man of upright character and earnest purpose; made so by the love he bore the dark-eyed Spanish girl, of whom he was resolved to be worthy, at whatever cost.

The tears came into Juanita's eyes, as Cenci talked, but his consoling statements and cheery manner drove them away; and when the conversation ended, at the Hummer's return, the latter could not fail to note the changed air of Juanita.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE HUMMER FEATHERS HIS NEST.

THE Hummer in his walk along the face of the bluff had made some important discoveries. The first was but a confirmation of what he had already believed: i. e., that the little caves or drifts into the rocks made by the natives, had been so located that escape by the way of the river front was impossible. The second discovery was that the bluff at that point was merely a high wall of stratified rock, of so little thickness that the caves extended almost half-way through it.

The rock was of a shaly, flaky consistency; and the Hummer came back firm in the belief that it would not be a difficult thing to further extend one of the caves and tunnel through. If this could be done without discovery by the natives, the chances of escape would be of the best.

How to cross the desert would be a matter for after consideration. The natives might possess ponies which could be used for the purpose. At any rate, it seemed better to die in the effort to regain liberty, than to sit there and go mad from the sheer stagnation that would be produced by a constant survey of the dreary landscape.

Hartsook's face was lighted with the new hope; and he proceeded in a few brief words to disclose the nature of his discoveries, and to speak of the plans that had come to his mind. In both Juanita and Cenci, he found enthusiastic listeners.

"Let us look into the thing at once," said Cenci, getting up from the rock and turning to the nearest cave.

It was the one Juanita had occupied.

All three entered it, but the examination was principally made by the Hummer. He got down on his hands and knees to examine the strata, while the others stood to one side to allow the light to come in, and then with a bit of rock he tapped sharply on the walls.

Their suddenly raised hopes sunk. They had no tools with which to work, and the walls were too firm for them to make any impression on them with the bowlders and pieces of rock they might gather.

From this cave they went to the one in which Cenci and Hartsook were placed, without finding anything more encouraging. There were four caves in all, and these they examined with great minuteness. In one they found a loosened slab, which the Hummer pried away, but only a little hole or pocket the size of a man's fist was revealed. After spending hours in this manner, they abandoned the plan as impracticable, and returned to the outside, their melancholy much increased.

The day passed without the occurrence of anything to cheer them; and when night came, they were in a very despondent state.

For hours after his companions were asleep, Hartsook strode moodily up and down his limited beat along the face of the bluff, in a condition of mind that verged on despair.

Gradually he extended his walk, to see what the ever-vigilant sentinels would do. They shook their spears at him, but he continued on, until he saw one man deliberately fitting an arrow to his bow, and knew that it would not be safe to venture further.

He was about to turn back and retrace his way to the cave, when his eyes caught a metallic glitter. He advanced another pace, and picked up the object which shone so strangely in the moonlight. It was the empty shell of a brass cartridge, fashioned into shape for a powder-measure, and it was attached to a well-filled powder horn.

He shook the horn to assure himself that it really contained powder, and a thrill of joy came to him as he knew that it did, and observed the large size of the horn.

One of their Spanish guards had either dropped it there or placed it there intentionally, and then forgot it when the time came for him to leave.

Hartsook gazed on the horn with as much pleasure as if it had been filled with diamonds. Just then its contents were worth more to him than diamonds, for they seemed to point the way to liberty.

He was not at all certain of the success of his new formed plan, and so did not think it

wise to rouse his companions and acquaint them with it, knowing they needed all the sleep they could get.

He hurried into the cave containing the little pocket in the rock, and thrust his hand into the cup-like hole, as if to measure its capacity. The pocket was at the point where the two strata of rock pressed against each other, a fact he had noted on his first examination.

He felt in his clothing for matches, but could find none, and then remembered that Cenci had a few in a case, and that he had seen him deposit the case that day on a shelf in their cave with some other articles.

He tip-toed softly in by the sleeping man, secured the case, and retreated as quietly as he had entered. There were only four matches in it, but probably these would answer as well as a score.

When he had returned to the pocket, he poured into it the contents of the horn, and found there was enough to fill it comfortably full with a little to spare. Then he laid a little train of powder along the shelf leading to the pocket.

Going outside, he secured a quantity of dry grass which he twisted into a string; and, returning with it, placed one end of the string on the powder train.

The cave was at some distance from those occupied by Juanita and Cenci, being separated from them by the third cave and a heavy wall of rock many feet through.

He felt that no harm could come to them from the explosion he contemplated producing; but on thinking the matter over, he thought it might save them the fright of the shock, if he aroused them before firing the blast.

This he did: telling them he intended to scare the natives out of the country, if he accomplished nothing else.

Then he went in and touched a lighted match to the dry grass, coming out after he had seen the grass freely burning.

Scarcely a minute did they have to wait for the explosion. It came with a boom and a crash that rocked the bluff whereon they stood, and seemed to rend the very hills.

Glancing about, they saw the startled natives flying toward the river as if chased by all the demons of the universe.

The sight brought a new idea to the minds of all.

The Hummer peered into the little cave and saw that it was filled with *debris* and smoke.

"This is our time!" he cried. "We've frightened the rascals off. You two go on around the bluff, while I poke into the cave a bit. I'd like to see if that blast tore its way clear through. The way those rascals were running, I don't think there is any danger of them coming back before daylight."

Cenci and Juanita hastily collected their few belongings and started across the face of the bluff. Not a native was to be seen, and their spirits rose correspondingly. If they could but find that the frightened villagers had horses, their escape from the place seemed a matter of comparative ease.

Itching with curiosity to know the result of his "shot," the Hummer crept over the *debris* and into the cave. The place was so transformed he would scarcely have recognized it. Great bowlders had been torn out and hurled to the floor, and everywhere was heaped wreckage. But look as he would, he could not see the starlight which he expected to find shining in from the other end. The blast had not torn its way through the rock.

He stopped suddenly, a strange fear coming upon him. A puff of cool air had swept against his cheek. He knew it had not come from the entrance behind him. Where had it come from?

He crept on more cautiously than ever. The way seemed to incline downward. A loosened pebble slipped and rattled away into unknown depths. He drew back and struck a match, a thing he felt he ought to have done before, though he realized that it only left two remaining of his store.

He sprang back with a gasp of surprise. A yawning gulf lay before him, into which he would have plunged at another step.

A bowlder turned beneath his feet, the match went out, and as he strove to regain his equilibrium, he felt himself shot into space, and then falling! falling!

He threw out his hands and uttered a wild cry. His brain swam. It seemed that his descent would never be checked. Then he landed with a crash.

Beyond the fright, though, the fall had not in the least injured him. His body had come in contact with the bed of yielding sand, and thus the force of the fall was broken. For a time he was almost too bewildered to think. Then he sprang up and felt about him. One of his hands touched the solid rock.

The suspense was fearful. Where was he? Would he ever be able to get out?

He decided that another one of the matches must be sacrificed. He scratched it carefully against the rock, and when it sprang into a flame, he endeavored to determine the character of the place he was in.

It was a cave of unknown extent. A cry of astonishment broke from his lips.

The sides of the cave were literally seamed with gold-ore.

By a strange accident, he had made a discovery that was destined to bring him wealth beyond his wildest dreams.

The Hummer from Hummingbird had feathered his nest!

CHAPTER XLIV.

ENTOMBED ALIVE.

THE match went out, and the impenetrable darkness was once more about him. He looked up toward the little cave from which he had fallen. The scanty light which came into it from the outside served to illuminate it in a feeble manner and reveal the round-shaped but ragged hole opened by the explosion. He could only see the merest outline, and it resembled the mouth of a well, far above him.

A groan broke from his lips. Would he ever be able to climb back to that height? The feat appeared impossible. What was all that gold-ore to him, now? Its presence served only to mock him and tell him of his weakness. All the wealth stored in that cavern could not purchase him liberty!

He reached out his hand and again touched the rock. It was cold and cheerless, showing that the blessed sunlight had never penetrated to it.

He wondered if he could climb up the rugged face. There were a few niches, and into these he set his fingers. Then he drew himself up by main strength and tried to get a footing.

The effort was exhausting and he dropped back to the sand.

Again he looked up at the well-like aperture, wishing he had not sent Cenci and Juanita away.

He sprang to his feet, and lifting his voice, called loudly to them, the echoes rolling dismally through the subterranean archways. No sound came back in answer to his calls. Manifestly, they were beyond hearing.

In that time of agony, it seemed to him that even the face of one of the half-savage villagers at the opening would have given him pleasure. But no face appeared, and he again began to consider how he might get out by his own efforts.

He was afraid to move from the point where he was standing, not knowing what horrible abyss might yawn near. Nothing offered any hope but the bare face of the rock, and that hope was feeble enough.

Once more he set his fingers in the niches, planted his feet and drew himself up. Despair lent him strength. The wall curved inward near the top, and how he was to gain the aperture, should he succeed in climbing as far as the wall ran perpendicularly, was a question he would not consider. To think would be to bring on madness. He must do something, or the horrors of his situation would kill him.

He reached other niches, and drew himself up; this he repeated again and again, making his way up in a manner that would not have been possible under any other conditions. His temporary strength was giant-like. The muscles of his body stood out like knots, and the perspiration rolled from him in a steady stream, while his breathing was panting and labored.

Up, up he went! Slowly and toilingly, but ever up! His lungs seemed clogged, his heart hammered, and his brain was reeling.

A noise came to him from the opening.

He looked up and saw that two of the villagers were peering down at him. They flashed a light into the opening, and when they beheld him clinging against the face of the rock, they filled the air with their discordant cries.

Even in his torturing agony, the Hummer had yet a thought for Cenci and Juanita. Where were they? What had become of them?

The natives drew up the torch; and he heard them calling to their companions outside. A trampling of feet and the buzz of conversation came to him.

Then, while he still stared at the opening, a great stone was rolled across it, as across the mouth of a pit, and he was in the desolation of utter darkness.

A wailing cry, so sobbing and heart-rending that it might have moved the soul of the lowest savage, came from his lips; and his hold upon the rock loosening, he fell again into the depths of the cavern.

How long he lay there in a state of semi-stupor, he did not know.

Consciousness was slow in returning, and when the full horrors of his situation once more dawned upon him, he shrunk back and covered his face with his hands. The Hummer from Hummingbird was not a coward, but the awfulness of this new form of peril thoroughly unmanned him.

After a time he again sufficiently regained his strength to feel like making another attempt. The way by which he had come in was blocked; but might there not be passages somewhere leading to the outside world?

He resolved to husband his one remaining match, come what might. To strike it now would serve but a momentary purpose.

He got down on his hands and knees and began to crawl slowly forward. He did not know in what direction he was going, but one way seemed as good as another. He feared to try to walk, lest he should step into some pitfall.

He crept on and on, feeling out every inch of the way before advancing. The sandy floor seemed illimitable. He began to question whether he had done a wise thing in leaving the wall. It would at least have served as a guide to keep him in one direction.

It was too late now to retrace his way. He might not find the wall again, for the chances were that he had not kept on in a straight course. He might be even traveling in a circle, as persons are said to do who become lost. In that event he would finally come back to the wall, and could then follow it on.

He moved forward again, feeling the same sand beneath his hands and knees. At last he drew up sharply. His hands had fallen on something that was not sand; neither was it rock.

He thrust out his hands again, uttering a low cry of gladness. There was before him a heaped-up pile of drift. How had it come there? Surely, this was not the channel of an old river!

He crawled quickly forward, searching with eager fingers to ascertain the extent of the pile. There was a vast store of it, and it was dry as tinder. Now he could have light! Now he could see where he was, and what surrounded him!

With the utmost care he felt among the bits of wood, some of which were half buried in the dry sand. He selected a few which would serve his purpose, and crumbling and breaking them to pieces, deposited them in a well-made heap.

Then with fingers that shook, he drew out his one match. If that should fail him! The very thought was keenest torture. He handled the match as tenderly as if it were brittlest glass, or a feather of infinitesimal weight, which the slightest breath might blow away.

That no accident might befall the lighting of the precious match, he took off one of his shoes and turned the sole upward to strike it on.

Then, with as firm a stroke as possible, he drew it across the hard leather. It crackled sharply, then burst into a flame.

How he shielded the tiny light, guarding it as if it were the very breath of life! When the flame had taken firmer hold, he applied it gingerly to the heaped-up pile of drift. The wood was almost as inflammable as powder, and a blaze that steadily increased was the immediate result.

With much solicitude, he hung over the blaze, feeding it from the drift-pile near at hand; and when it roared and sputtered gleefully, waving back the gloom with its red arms, he danced about it as if its light had suddenly turned him into a maniac.

He heaped on more wood, and looked about him. On each side were walls running up to a low roof. Neither of the walls were far away. Behind him, the cavern stretched into gloomy depths, and in front a tunnel seemed to invite him on.

Like a miser gloating over his gold, he surveyed the store of drift; and again was suggested the question of how it got there. The cavern might at some date have been filled with water, but he could not think it a river bed, though, to judge from the sand, a stream had once flowed through it. But if the drift had been deposited by water, there would in all likelihood have been more of it about. There was but the one pile, and from the manner in which the wood was disposed, he was inclined to think it had been brought there by human hands.

If that were the correct solution of the mystery, then there was an opening somewhere in the cavern! To still further convince himself, he made a study of the arrangement of the wood.

"Yes; there is a way out!" he shouted, fairly intoxicated with joy. "And I will find it!"

This hope brought firmness and decision to him. In a measure, his old self-reliance came back, and he became again the characteristic Hummer from Hummingbird.

He took off his hat and looked jubilantly at the wings.

"They still wave!" he declared. "It's a wonder they haven't been knocked to bits by all I've gone through. I call them my banner of victory; and so long as they flutter, I'll not again lose hope."

He put the hat back on his head, and began to search for some pieces of wood to do service as torches. Having selected a sufficient quantity, he laid them into piles; and then tearing the linen from his coat, formed strips of cloth with which to bind them.

Having prepared six torches this way, he lighted one at the fire, and he held it aloft to see how it would answer his purpose.

He found it a good illuminator, though it burned almost too rapidly to suit him. He would have prepared more, but the five remaining were as many as he could conveniently carry.

He extinguished it by thrusting the end into the sand; and then heaped more drift on the fire, that it might not readily die out, should he wish to come back to it. Then he re-light-

ed the torch, and walked deliberately toward the tunnel.

As he entered the somewhat narrow passage, the breeze, which had been the merest breath in the cavern, greatly increased, so much so, that he was seized with a sudden fear lest the torch might be blown out. He looked back at the cheerfully blazing fire. It encouraged him. Its light could be seen for a long distance; and even should a turn shut it out, he could follow the turn back, and re-light the torch, in case the breeze extinguished it.

Thus cheered he pressed boldly into the tunnel, walking steadily forward, for the torch clearly illumined the way.

The passage proved a tortuous one, and in some places very narrow. He lost sight of the fire in the cavern; but when the torch had nearly burned out, he lighted another from it, and continued on.

Three torches were consumed, and he was on the point of lighting the fourth, when another bend in the tunnel brought the breeze so strongly, that the torch was blown out.

He uttered a cry of dismay; but, when the darkness cleared slightly, he saw a beam of light; and running quickly forward, he emerged through a rocky opening upon the river-bank.

He looked up with thankful heart to the silent stars, and could have wept for joy!

CHAPTER XLV.

HEMMED IN.

A SAVAGE yell came to his ears, checking his pleasurable emotions. Those uttering the yell were not far away; and as he stood anxiously listening, endeavoring to determine the exciting cause, it was repeated.

He looked in the direction from whence it seemed to come, and saw a group of the villagers gathered in front of a rock on which two crouching forms were faintly outlined.

He knew by intuition that the forms were those of Cenci and Juanita.

They had endeavored to escape around the bluff. The villagers, however, had not retreated further than the river; and seeing these two, their courage had in a measure returned.

They had charged on the escaping prisoners, and the latter, not wishing to be driven back to caves, and thinking the Hummer would shortly follow them, had turned in flight.

They had run for perhaps half a mile, and until Juanita could run no further, and then being hotly pressed had taken refuge on the pile of rocks, where Cenci had held their pursuers at bay by hurling stones down at them.

Hartsook took in the character of the situation, and, giving an encouraging shout, hastened toward the rocks.

Cenci, who was almost exhausted with the long fight he had made, heard the shout and eagerly replied to it.

The Indians heard it also, and their yells increased.

"This way!" Hartsook called. "Come this way!"

The Indians could now see him as well as hear him, and, although they could not understand words, their clamor greatly increased.

One daring fellow bounded up the pile of rocks and boldly tried to spear Cenci, but a well-aimed boulder sent him tumbling down again. There were others, however, who seemed eager to take the place of the fallen man.

They were enraged beyond measure lest their prisoners should escape. Possibly the resultant terrors so strongly depicted by Father Petrie were what incited them to this unwonted bravery.

Again and again the boldest charged up the slope, giving Cenci no time to turn in flight, for if he had done so, the villagers would have crowded on him and Juanita, and they would most likely have been speared to death.

Hartsook continued to shout his cheering cries, running at the same time as fast as he could to the aid of his friends.

Gaining the rear of the heap of rocks, he scrambled quickly to the summit, and grasping Juanita about the waist, lifted her and beat a retreat.

Cenci thus relieved of a large burden of responsibility, followed more leisurely, stopping occasionally to hurl a shower of stones when the Indians pressed him too closely.

Hartsook led the way to the cavern entrance from which he had so short a time before emerged, and then, facing about and beckoning to Cenci, he bore the half-fainting girl within the security of the tunnel.

Hartsook followed as speedily as possible, defiantly hurling a last stone, just before vanishing from the view of the villagers.

The entrance to the tunnel in which they now found themselves was much contracted; and a few bushes growing about the mouth of it served in a measure to conceal it. Whether the Indians knew of its existence or not was a question difficult to determine. Very probably they did; and it may be that some of them, or their fathers before them, had carried the heap of driftwood into the cave.

The Indians, made furious by the disappearance of their foes, charged boldly up to the very entrance, and let fly a shower of arrows

into the tunnel. A number of spears were hurled, also.

Fortunately, the arrows did no harm, and the spears were very acceptable to Hartsook and Cenci as weapons. These were of some heavy wood, the sharp points having been hardened by fire. They were clumsy looking things, but in the hands of a strong and dextrous thrower might be made very effective.

Juanita was sent further within the tunnel; and then with their spears, the Hummer and Cenci stood near the entrance prepared to repel any attack.

No attack came, though the Indians continued to yell in a most ferocious manner.

Soon a heavy stone rolled from above into the very mouth of the passage. Some of the villagers had climbed to the rocks overhead, from which they could safely propel these stones.

"They are going to block us in!" Hartsook asserted, remembering how the big boulder had been rolled across the entrance through which he had first come.

It was soon made apparent that he was correct. Another big stone fell almost while he was speaking, and soon they descended in a shower.

"There is no chance of getting out the other way?" Cenci questioned.

"None whatever!" with a dismal shake of the head. "We'll never get out of here alive!"

The outlook was truly a gloomy one. They might push away the stones and make a dash for liberty; but if they were not crushed by other stones hurled from above, they were certain to meet death from the spear-points and arrows.

"If we remain here, we shall starve!" Hartsook continued, completing the thought in the minds of both.

Juanita overheard the words; and Cenci, seeing her crouching by the wall in a frightened and pitiable way, endeavored to say something to encourage her. There was little, however, of an encouraging character to say.

As he was speaking, an arrow whizzed by him just missing a cheek. An Indian had crawled close up to the rocky barrier, and then shot the arrow through a chink between the boulders.

The Hummer, who was standing in the gloom not far from the Indian, thrust savagely at the hole with his spear, and a cry of pain and a hasty, backward scrambling told that the spear-point had touched the flesh.

That was a long night. It seemed the grateful morning light would never come. But the appearance of day did not much tend to mitigate their distress. The passage of hours only increased it. They had no food; and although a river of water flowed only a short distance away, there was no way by which they could reach it and slake their thirst.

Thus the day passed, to be succeeded by a night fuller of horrors than the first. It really seemed that they were shut in there to perish of thirst and starvation.

"Better a death by the Indian spears!" Hartsook thought, as he knelt before the little opening and gazed out at their untiring foes. "How long can we stand this?"

CHAPTER XLVI.

A PURSUIT.

WHEN Stuttering Sam returned to Santa Fe, his first work was to look up Clarkson Jinks. Then the gladiator was sent for; and the three, after some consultation, visited the residence of Jones Simpson. Morning was almost at hand; but Simpson responded promptly, and joined them shortly afterward, in the parlor. In a few minutes Miss Nevada was added to the company.

In a hasty and earnest way, Stuttering Sam ran over the events of the night.

"It's a big th-thing for us that they tried to carry me off," the sport affirmed, "I've learned something by it that I couldn't have learned otherwise. I've no d-doubt that Deel was taking me straight to the place where our fr-friends are held."

"We don't want to go on a wild-goose chase, though," Simpson averred.

At this, a discussion as to what was best to be done arose, in which Miss Nevada took an active part.

It was decided, finally, that the house of Deel and the Mission should be watched for twenty-four hours for developments. Inasmuch as Deel had returned to town, it was deemed very probable that some occurrence would take place of benefit to the searching party.

This plan was faithfully carried out; and although nothing suspicious was noted at Deel's, a squalid, stolid-looking Indian was observed to enter the Mission, on the succeeding night.

There could be no doubt that he had come on a secret errand, for he did not enter by the gate in the regular way, but climbed like a cat up one corner of the wall, and dropped upon the inside.

He remained invisible for a half-hour, then returned by the way he had come.

Stuttering Sam and the gladiator were on guard at that point.

"You f—follow him!" the sport commanded, "while I'll go and tell the others."

The gladiator hurried away after the retreating Indian, while Stuttering Sam went direct to Simpson's. On the way, he stopped at a point near Deel's, where Jinks had been placed on guard, and took the crest-hunter with him.

Simpson had had a number of horses saddled and in waiting, from the first.

When Miss Nevada came down and understood the nature of the discovery, and learned that her father intended to join the party of pursuit, she declared that she meant to go, too.

"I can ride as well as any of you!" she protested, her eyes flashing, in answer to her father's objections. "And I believe I can stand as much fatigue. At any rate, I'm going!"

The remonstrances of Jones Simpson were useless. Nevada was, in many respects, a spoiled child, and when she made up her mind to do a thing she usually did it.

Hence, when the party of pursuit rode from the streets of Santa Fe, Miss Simpson was of the number.

The Indian had taken the direction the sport had anticipated he would. The gladiator had followed him persistently. They soon overtook Garcia; after which they advanced at a more leisurely pace.

Garcia's information was to the effect that the Indian had taken a general southwesterly course; and as this was the same direction which Deel had pursued with the carriage, the conclusion came naturally that by following this Indian important discoveries might be expected.

It was not the easiest thing in the world to do, and would have been impossible but for the knowledge that he was keeping in a certain course from which he was not likely to swerve.

The gladiator kept close at the Indian's heels, while the others followed at a goodly distance in the rear, so that no knowledge of the fact that he was being trailed could come to the villager.

At short intervals the gladiator stuck bits of mesquite in the earth or heaped up a pile of bowlders and pebbles, much as one might blaze a way through a forest, and with these to guide them the party coming after him had small trouble in keeping to the right track.

Suddenly Garcia appeared before them. "The trail is lost," he said. "The rascal must have found out something, and has given me the slip. I have been trying every way to find his tracks again, but can't."

This was an unlooked-for blow.

A general search was instituted; but it resulted in nothing save a loss of valuable time.

Convinced they could not do any good by longer remaining there, the party started again, keeping the southwesterly course, hoping to come in sight of the retreating Indian with the appearance of daylight.

When day broke and the view across the sand wastes was seemingly limitless, they could discern nothing to indicate that the Indian had gone in that direction. They rode in sweeping and eccentric circles, like beagles beating for game, but it was all useless. The messenger—for such they supposed him to have been—had vanished.

The knowledge that had been gained by the stuttering sport, however, upheld and cheered them; and they pressed on, notwithstanding the obstacles and discouragements. And when the noon halt was called, that they might rest themselves and their animals, they had passed over many of the weary miles lying between Santa Fe and the point where the captives of the villagers were even then being so sorely pressed.

CHAPTER XLVII.

OVERWHELMED BY A SAND-STORM.

STUTTERING SAM questioningly held up a finger and looked across the plain. The day was hot and oppressive, exhaustingly so. For more than an hour there had not been a breath of wind; and as the party ate their noonday meal, they endeavored to escape as much as they could, from the heat and rays of the sun by burrowing in the bunch-grass at the base of a large rock.

They were almost ready to re-commence their journey, when the sport drew attention to himself by the gesture mentioned.

He had been led to it by a puff of hot wind which swept across his face. All followed with their eyes the point indicated. There was a miragry haze in the atmosphere, and objects in the desert were drawn out of all proportions and semblance to what they really were, converting the landscape into a chaotic phantasmagoria. Because of this, they had for more than an hour before dinner been marking their course with the aid of a compass.

In addition to the smoky atmosphere, little spirals of sand were seen racing hither and thither drawn up by twisting air-currents. It was an eccentric waltz on the grandest scale.

"We're g-going to have a blow!" the sport observed. "It w-won't be the l-loveliest thing in the world, either, for us to be caught out h-here in it!"

Some such reflection had come to each of them. There were no indications of a storm, in the general sense, but of a wind hurricane, and what that meant on the desert, they well knew.

"We must do something to get ready for it!" Clarkson asserted, casting about for a suggestion. "I had a little experience with one of those things down in Arizona once, and can't say that I was impressed with its agreeableness."

Jones Simpson and Miss Nevada looked blank. Miss Simpson had never endured the torture of a sand-storm, but Jones had; and it is no disparagement to say that just at that moment he wished he were safe back in Santa Fe.

"G-get together all the blankets, toweling and extra c-clothing you have," the stuttering sport commanded. "We'll need every bit of it in half an hour."

Events proved that he was a prophet.

The blankets were taken from the backs of the animals; and those which had been used under the saddles were twisted into shields and coverings for the heads of the horses. Every other available bit of cloth was pressed into service for the human members of the party. Everything that could be made use of was ripped up and twisted into bandages for the head, the object being to exclude the coming sand from the mouth, eyes, ears and nostrils.

They had not long in which to make their preparations. A dense black cloud lifted itself on the southern edge of the plain, and soon obscured the sky in that direction.

It came on with wonderful rapidity, little gusts of hot wind laden with fine, red sand preceding it. Then, with a roar, as if all the fiends of the infernal regions had been suddenly loosed, it swooped down.

It seemed that certain suffocation must follow its furious onset. The biting sand, fine almost as flour and blown by the high, singing wind, stung every exposed surface like shot hurled from a gun. Even with the aid of the mufflers which covered the head and neck it was impossible to entirely exclude the insidious foe. Wherever the wind could penetrate it carried the sand with it.

The poor horses stood in the lee of the big rock, with heads bowed and a most woe-begone aspect. The flying sand filled their coats and manes in a way that was most irritating, and the close way in which their heads were wrapped did not add to their general sense of comfort.

For an hour the storm raged with great fury, the sand drifting badly and being piled in great heaps over the pebbles and small stones which had previously been exposed to view. Then the wind sunk; and the worst of the blow was over. But another hour passed before the party could think of moving on.

When they did so, the entire surface of the country seemed changed. The drifts were heaped everywhere, covering all nature like a fall of red snow. Their own appearances, too, were changed quite as much. The sand had cut and blistered their faces, filled their hair, and given their eyes a red and bloodshot look.

"I think I'd r-rather meet a war-party of Apaches than another s-s-such blow!" the sport gruefully stammered. "I hope the H-Hummer and Cenci were not out in it."

The others echoed the hope; but there was not much desire for conversation in the bedraggled, little company. A sense of oppression and exhaustion weighed them down; and they struggled on in a manner that was listless in the extreme.

Fortunately they came on a desert spring near mid-afternoon, and here, beyond the limits of the late storm, they decided to halt until morning, believing that more good work could be accomplished in the end by taking proper rest now than by pushing forward when all were so nearly wearied out.

This was the wisest thing they could have done.

Just before morning, Stuttering Sam lifted himself on an elbow and inclined his head in a listening attitude. Some strange sound had come to him. He concluded at first that he might have been aroused by a dream; but even as he listened the sound came again.

It was faint and far away, and as it floated to him on the night wind he was inclined to turn back to his couch and resume his slumbers, thinking it merely the howl of coyotes.

He did not, however, but waited for its repetition. Then he touched Garcia, who lay next to him.

"Get up, and st-stretch your ears a minute, and tell wh-what that is," he requested.

The gladiator did as requested.

"Is it c-coyotes?" Sam questioned.

Garcia shook his head.

"Indians!" was the sententious answer.

The sport scrambled quickly to his feet.

"Awake ye sleepers!" he called, rousing every one with his stentorian tones. "There are a l-lot of yelling Indians off to the south-west, and ten ch-chances to one, they've got our friends corraled. Either th-that, or they're up to some other dirt that needs looking into."

There was great bustle and confusion in the little camp, and shouts and calls as the horses were brought up, and preparations made for the journey.

Very little time was consumed, however; and within ten minutes after Garcia had so confidently announced that the far-away sounds

were made by Indians, all were in the saddle and ready for a long, hard ride.

Stuttering Sam and the gladiator led the way, pushing the horses into a speedy gait. The rest obtained during the evening and night had been of great benefit, and all were again in fairly good condition.

Five miles were passed over in a rapid manner; and as day was breaking, they drew up on the margin of a small stream. The yells which had grown louder and louder as they advanced had ceased some time before, and they were consequently at a loss as to the direction to be taken.

"It c-couldn't have been far from here," and the sport bent forward on his horse's neck, straining his vision in the faint light of the new day.

At that moment the yells came again from down the river; and turning the heads of their animals in that direction, they rode at a furious pace.

Louder and fiercer grew the yells, as they raced forward, a sure indication that a fight of some character was in progress. Brighter and brighter grew the new day; and when they rounded a rocky bend, they saw before them the howling villagers who had cooped up the Hummer and Cenci and Juanita in the narrow tunnel. Beyond the screeching Indians a glimpse of the village could be caught.

"They are not Apaches," said Garcia, after he had looked at them attentively. "They are more like the Pueblos. They are not fighters, though, as a rule."

"Ch-charge them, anyway!" the sport commanded. "They've got some poor devil h-hemmed in there!"

Nevada was requested by her father to remain behind at this juncture, but she steadfastly refused to do anything of the kind. The idea had crept into her wise little head that the Indians were besieging Cenci and the others, and she resolved to accompany the charging party, no matter what perils might lie in the path.

As persuasion was useless, Simpson withheld further remonstrance, and everything being in readiness, the order was given to advance. As usual, Garcia and the sport led the way.

The Indians had not seen them as yet, and were therefore all unaware of the thunderbolt that was about to fall. Not until the riders were within three hundred yards did the villagers know of their presence.

A panic was the result. They knew something of the nature of fire-arms and had a wholesome fear of the prowess of well-armed white men, and that sweeping charge struck terror to them. Their vindictive rage was forgotten in the desire to escape punishment.

The charging party did not fire a shot, seeing that it was really unnecessary and would result in a useless waste of life.

Before they reached the point around which the villagers had been gathered, Hartsook, Cenci and Juanita made their appearance. They had almost given over to despair, when the cheering of their friends brought renewed hope.

The villagers fled to the sand wastes and hills lying to the southward; but they were not followed, neither was any injury done to their mud huts or to their crops, for their ignorance had been taken advantage of by the unworthy Father Petrie, who was really the one guilty.

The reunion between Cenci and Miss Nevada was characterized by fervent demonstrations of joy, they not seeming to care that others were the witnesses of this exhibition of their love for each other.

At the first opportunity, and while the Hummer's wonderful find was being explored and examined, Stuttering Sam managed to draw Juanita into a walk, in which he took occasion to again lay his heart at her feet, as he had done so long before in the San Muerto hospital.

"I love you!" he declared, in a tone that left no doubt of his entire sincerity. "And that love has made a new man of me. If you w-will be my wife, Juanita, I p-promise that you shall never regret it!"

She had had time to fight out the battle in those long hours in the desert, and now knew her heart as she had never before known it.

"I will be your wife!" she said, simply. "We love each other, and may the Blessed Virgin bless our love!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the wonderful mine which Hartsook had so strangely discovered had been claimed in his name by a notice posted, as is required by law, the return journey was commenced. The details of it are not essential here.

Santa Fe was reached on the day following, and on their arrival there they found many things to give them pleasure. Slocum had worked with a vim during the absence of Cenci and the Hummer, and his efforts through the Avalanche had been so prospered that there was a very noticeable modification of the sentiment of the town.

Few men could now be found to say that they believed Hartsook and Cenci guilty of the attempt on the bank.

Not only that, but the discussion led by Slo-

cum in the Legislature had so drawn the attention of all to the great gift which Deel had made to Petrie that a general impression of the true cause leading Deel to this bit of unwonted generosity had grown up.

Deel, seeing that the land would be regained by Cenci, had become almost venomous in his fury, and conceiving another scheme for its disposal, he went to Petrie with a demand that it be re-deeded to him.

"It was to the Church!" said Petrie, with a coolness which staggered Deel, even as it irritated him. "The gift is not to me, it is to the Church. I am only the custodian."

"You understood the circumstances and our secret agreement concerning it!" and Deel's eyes blazed. "I was to give you a certain sum of money, and the land was to come back to me whenever I wished."

"Pay its value, and you can take it," Petrie responded. "You have ruined both of us, Deel, and I shall not fool any longer with you."

"I will pay what I agreed, and you can name a big sum in the deed, as you promised to. That is fair! The property cost you nothing."

"And it cost you but little more!" the priest retorted.

"Then you will not re-deed it?"

"I will not! Why should I? You will have to leave Santa Fe for good inside of a week; and I should be a fool to throw away such property, when it could do you no good and can be so valuable to the Mission."

"I can dispose of it!" Deel pleaded.

The father, however, merely turned his back on him and walked away.

Deel was wild with disappointment and rage. He hastened to his office and prepared a paper; and, shortly after, appeared before Slocum, his face white with wrath and the fire of incipient insanity in his eyes.

"Take this," he said, a strange look on his features as he saw in the office Stuttering Sam, Hike Harstook, Cerro Cenci, Jones Simpson and Nevada, together with Juanita, the gladiator and others.

"Take it and read it when I'm gone. It will open your eyes, a little, maybe!"

He vanished, almost bounding from the room, so great was his haste and so deep his excitement.

In answer to the inquiring glances, Slocum deliberately opened the paper and read:

"The game has been played to a finish, and I have lost! But I shall not fail alone, for Petrie is as big a scamp as I have ever dared be! I confess that I obtained possession of the Cenci lands through fraud, a fraud running back through long years. I thought I should be perfectly safe, and until recently enjoyed the fruits my wrong, fearing no punishment and feeling secure. My thoughts are wild, and I can hardly write intelligently and connectedly, but I shall endeavor to reveal the truth.

"I became acquainted with the elder Cenci long before his death. He had just lost his beautiful wife, and had sent his children away, seeming to prefer the life of a recluse. I cultivated his good opinion and became the custodian of many of his secrets.

"Some time before his last illness I drew up a deed to the Cenci lands, which I presented to him, telling him it was something else, and as he could not see to read very well, induced him to sign it. Then I took it to a rascally notary whom I knew and got the witnesses to attest the signature. The lying old Mexican deceived you, probably through a treacherous memory. He said it was not signed by Cenci, but it was, though the signature was so sprawling and confused that it would scarcely have been recognized as such.

"I thought I was safe, and felt safe, and so I was encouraged to make the fight I have. But not long ago, in destroying some other papers, I accidentally destroyed the original of the deed; and then I felt I should have scant show in the courts.

"It has been a losing game from the first, and life has many times lately been a torture to me. But I fought hard, which is the only thing I can boast of.

"Petrie has refused to re-convey the land to me, though he promised faithfully to do so, when I gave him the deed. I thought I might do something yet to retrieve my fortunes and baffle justice, but my cowardly confederate failed me. It was he who burned the Cenci records at the Mission; he who hired one of the peon girls living near the Mission gate to personate Juanita Cenci!

"That is not a slip of the pen! I do mean Juanita Cenci! She is the long-lost—or supposedly-lost—daughter of old Cenci; and is the sister of Cerro Cenci, as Heaven is my witness.

"How does it all come? I will tell you! I learned through Petrie that the girl was to be brought back and placed with a relative living near here; and seeing that that might make future trouble to me, I got Petrie to steal her away from her home and bring her to the San Muerto Mission, and raise her for the life of a nun, thinking that that would be the best way to dispose of her. And this he did; and she would now be in Mexico if he had not grown weak-hearted or afraid.

"And Juanita as a Cenci, is entitled to the land, which I want you to tear from the priest! He is a traitor, a hypocrite of the deepest dye! Do not let him escape!

"Petrie employed a woman to personate Juanita, for purposes of his own and at first to trap the sport; and I employed men to personate Harstook and Cenci. I shall not name them, for they served me well. It is Petrie only I would strike.

"And, now, having done this much in expiation, and as a blow on the side of justice, farewell forever!

JASON DEEL."

"Send an officer for his arrest!" ordered Slocum. "He intends to escape."

The officer was sent; but a gruesome sight he met, when the door of Deel's office had been battered in. Hanging to a beam that had been fastened above the door was the body of the arch-schemer. He had committed suicide, immediately after hastening from Slocum's.

"He lived game and he died game!" said the Hummer, as he gazed somewhat mournfully into the blackened and rigid features. "His grit was his only redeeming trait. 'Twas a fearful punishment!"

The knowledge that Juanita was really Cenci's sister came like a shock, an agreeable shock it is true, to most people. The town rung with it, and the next issue of the *Avalanche* dilated at length on the happy fate that had attended her, and also proceeded to praise her beauty and goodness in a way that was bewildering to the simple-minded girl.

Father Petrie, brought to bay and all his plots revealed, endeavored to fly the country; but he was taken, degraded from the priesthood he had so dishonored—the great Church he had so wounded, and that he was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for his villainies was a sincere satisfaction to every good Catholic.

He did not go to prison alone! The scamps who had personated the Hummer and Cenci were ferreted out, and sentenced also for burglary; and the scarred bridge foreman went, too, for his participation in the criminal acts instigated by Jason Deel.

Two months after the occurrence of these events, there was a double wedding in old Santa Fe. The happy couples then united for life, were Cerro Cenci and Nevada Simpson, Samuel Hollingsworth and Juanita Cenci.

Slocum was there, as a matter of course, beaming and good-humored, and he waltzed with the fair Nevada, even as he had done on the night of the great ball given by Jones Simpson in his honor. Clarkson Jinks graced the wedding with his presence. Manuel Garcia was there, also—his brave heart overflowing with the kindest feelings. And there was a proud light in his eyes, not occasioned altogether by these weddings. He had been restored to his old position and place, and was once more the great *espada*, loved and admired of the Santa Fe New Mexicans.

Of course no one could expect that Harstook would be absent. He had fought a great fight and had conquered, and that was glory enough; and he was supremely happy in the happiness he had been instrumental in bringing to these friends. His mine was yielding beyond even his anticipations, and every one knew that on that day there were few richer men in the Territory than the be-winged and whole-hearted Hummer from Hummingbird.

THE END.

Beadle's Dime Library.

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- *397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
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